



Southampton Group

AMNESTY NEWS

www.amnesty-volunteer.org/uk/southampton-city

If you would like more information about the Group or would like to take part in any activities please get in touch by e-mailing:

AmnestySouthampton@yahoo.co.uk

APRIL 2021

Governments Approach to Immigration

Caroline Nokes MP

Context: Caroline Nokes left the Home Office, vowing never to speak of immigration again. But after a year her anger at the direction immigration was taking drove her to take action e.g., a recent article in the Independent News Paper. A number of AI members from the Romsey and Southampton Groups had read this article and as a result invited Caroline to a joint virtual meeting. At the meeting on the 4th March, Caroline gave a frank exposition of her views of the Home Office's current approach, a summary of which is outlined below. This article has been read by Caroline and its accuracy confirmed.

Home Office's Attitude/Approach to immigration: this is very dependent on the attitude/approach of the Home Secretary. Caroline felt that when Sajid Javid and Amber Rudd had been Home Secretary they were determined to learn the lessons of Windrush and give the Home Office a more "human face". More recently, the HO appears not to have made progress on this initiative, and asylum claims in particular seen as "work in progress" not people. She expressed her concerns about the lack of resources given to the asylum system and that staff were junior.

Determinations: decisions about whether or not to grant refugee status take far too long. The target is 6 months, but the reality is closer to several years. The system does not work well and is poorly served by ineffective lawyers and she had recently heard young applicants complain about the interpreters available to them, as the issue is not just about language but also "style". In Caroline's view the system is too black and white at the moment. No account seems to be taken at this stage that it is possible further documentation may become available. The only way to consider additional information is via appeals, which prolongs the process. A system needs to be developed which takes into account the difficulty of getting all the documents together, the trauma that the asylum seeker may be going through and the need for keeping to a six-month limit as far as possible. Cont. on page 2

AI's VISION

is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards

AI's MISSION

is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom and conscience and expression and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights

AI's CORE VALUES

remain those of international solidarity, effective action for the individual victim, global coverage, the universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy and mutual respect

Cont from page 1

Right to work in Caroline's view the right to work would not need to change if the determinations met the points raised above. She felt that this would be preferable to allowing asylum seekers to work which would cause complications with the benefits system.

Accommodation: In Caroline's view ex-army barracks were not a good option, but better than the "pop-up" camp being proposed at Barton Stacey. The Barton Stacey proposal for 500 asylum seekers in cabins has shown a complete disregard for planning rules. There would be no facilities, all resources would have to be brought in, including water and waste would have to be removed by tankers. All power would need to be provided by noisy generators. There are no specific health facilities, it is close to a very busy dual carriageway and close to an army range with the sound of gun fire! There has been no discussion with local experts such as the Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group.

A motivation for the HO proposing such camps appears to be about making an unattractive destination for asylum seekers. However, Caroline pointed out that this would be unlikely to happen as there are three factors which makes the UK an attractive destination for asylum seekers i.e. the language, family ties and the fact that the UK still has a positive reputation internationally.

Future: Caroline was asked how she saw the future as far as this area was concerned. She said she was concerned at the narrative around migration / asylum, which certainly in sections of the tabloid media contained a vein of racism. For example, Nigel Farage had claimed recently that a boat full of immigrants had arrived in the UK all of them Covid 19 positive. This was not True! It was clear Ministers believed the country was on their side when they talked tough about changing the asylum system.

She was very clear that she did not feel the Dubs amendment would pass if it was brought back.

The HO has promised to bring forward a new asylum bill. The HO appears to have two main reasons why they want to do this. Firstly they believe the current system is broken and in particular there are too many appeals. Secondly, since we left the EU the Dublin agreement no longer applies to the UK. Caroline believes it is indeed broken because determinations take far too long.

What can be done to ensure a more humane asylum system: The first point Caroline made was that asylum applications in this country were very small approximately 40,000 per year compared to say Germany upwards of 100,000 per annum.

We need to lobby our MPs write to local press and show that not everyone buys into the negative narrative.

Caroline referred to one positive move that was taking place in Westminster under the Chairmanship of the Bishop of Durham called RAMP. It is a cross party project. We must learn the lessons of Windrush and change the negative narrative.

Campaign Real Lives

KARLA PONTIGO (MEXICO)

Accidental death finding ignores the evidence

On 28 October 2012, Karla Pontigo was found in her workplace severely injured. She died in hospital the next day. The Attorney General of San Luis Potosi concluded that the death of the 22 yr old was an accident. Yet her injuries were inconsistent with the alleged accident and the autopsy recorded evidence of sexual assault.

On 13 November 2019, the National Supreme Court of Justice ordered the Prosecutor's Office to open a new investigation, taking into account the possibility that Karla's gender may have been one reason for the killing. But the new investigation has yet to begin. Mexico has along-established pattern of impunity for violent crimes against women, so this case must be investigated carefully.

APPEAL. Ask the Attorney General of San Luis Potosi to open an investigation into Karla's death as femicide, and to bring to justice the authorities for the negligent first investigation into Karla's death.

WRITE TO: Attorney General San Luis Potosi
Federico Arturo Garza Herrera
Eje Vial Ponciano Arriaga No. 100
Zona Centro, 78000 San Luis, SLP,
Mexico
Email: fiscaliageneralsip@outlook.com

SALUTATION: Ministro
or
The Chargé d'Affaires
Embassy of Mexico
16 St George Street
London W1S 1FD

Email: mexuk@sre.gob.mx

SALUTATION: Dear Chargé d'Affaires.

CORONA VIRUS

For the foreseeable future the Southampton Group will not be holding face-to-face meetings. However, we will be arranging virtual meetings see DIARY box. And if possible some external fundraising events

We plan to continue to produce a monthly News Letter.

Each month we will include at least one letter or action, which you will either be able to copy or email, any update we may receive about cases we are working on and news from the web.

DIARY

For details of how to join any of the events/meetings outlined below please contact our secretary, Valerie at our email address:
AmnestySouthampton@yahoo.co.uk

APRIL 2021

Monday 12th April: to discuss how we might work of refugee issues, based on work carried out in Kent.

MAY 2021

Monday 10th May: Simon John, Modern slavery

SOUTHAMPTON GROUP WHO'S WHO

Group Officers:

Chair: Giampaolo D'Alessandro

Secretary: Valerie Oswald

Treasurer: Gareth Davies

Outreach and Parliamentary Officer:
Veronica Tippetts

Newsletter: John Williams

Campaigning Activity:

People on the move

Protecting the space for human rights defenders

Death Penalty

HR Act

Snoopers Charter

South Asia

China

Case file: Marielle Franco, Brazil

Individual at Risk: Aster Fissehatsion and Dawit Isaak, Eritea

Issues on the Web

amnesty.org.uk

Include:

UK Government: Stop the assault on our freedoms. A new Bill giving police sweeping powers, is going through Parliament.

Iran: Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, help pressure the Iranian government.

Northern Ireland: Amnesty welcomes Westminster action on abortion services.

Syria: Justice for Syria, ten years on.

Human rights defenders: Around the world there is an unprecedented surge in attacks against human rights defenders- people who protect and promote human rights.

NB the views expressed in this News Letter may not necessarily be those of Amnesty International. John Williams editor