



## **A CHRISTMAS REFLECTION**

As we approach the Christmas season, we remind ourselves that our belief is above all one of faith, hope and love. If it were not, we would not be moved by compassion to be involved with refugees and migrants. We would have no confidence that our work will bear fruit, and we would see nothing beyond the human misery which seems so widespread.

Many people who passed by the stable in Bethlehem saw nothing but a displaced family in difficult circumstances. Others however, humble shepherds and wise men saw Immanuel, God-with-us. This was enough to provoke a massacre of innocent children and a flight into Egypt. The biblical stories therefore remind us that Salvation does not come as a prince in a fairy story, but that He is found among the extremes of human suffering. This suffering is a dark covering however, a covering which humans foolishly impose on one another to hide themselves from the love of God; but God's love is a love so intense that it caused God to join us in our sufferings and it is love so strong that it went beyond all suffering, all death.

So when Mary wrapped the Christ-child in swaddling clothes, God wrapped His people in everlasting love, and we are truly given good reason to rejoice.

*The Steering Committee of the Churches Refugee Network wishes you a blessed Christmas.*

## **NATIONAL**

### **URGENT! URGENT! ACT NOW!**

#### December deadline draws near

The deadline is looming for families wishing to apply for indefinite leave to enter or remain in the UK under the Government's one-off concession. The concession applies to some 15,000 families

who made a first application for asylum before 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2000 and was first announced last year by the Home Secretary. Des Browne, Immigration Minister, has written to MPs warning that the deadline for outstanding applications under the concession is 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004.

### **Asylum Statistics UK 2003**

#### *Main Points*

- Applications for asylum, excluding dependents, fell by 41% in 2003 to 49,405. The nationalities accounting for the most applicants were Somali, Iraqi, Chinese, Zimbabwean and Iranian.
- Including dependents, applications to the EU 15 fell by 19%, compared with a 42% fall for the UK and increases for France and Italy.
- 64,940 initial decisions were made on asylum applications in 2003, a fifth less than in 2002 but significantly higher in proportion to applications; hence the number of cases awaiting initial decision fell to 23,900 the lowest level for more than a decade.
- IAA Adjudicators determined a record 81,725 asylum appeals in 2003 – 20% were allowed and 78% dismissed.
- Overall, an estimated 28% of the applications in 2003 resulted in grants of asylum or exceptional leave to remain (5%), humanitarian protection or discretionary leave (11%), or in allowed appeals (12%).
- Asylum removals (including assisted returns and some voluntary departures) rose by 21% in 2003 to a record 13,005, excluding dependants. Including dependants, a record 17,895 refused asylum seekers were removed, 29% more than in 2002 (13,910).

### **Withdrawal of support from refused asylum seekers and families**

Section 10 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 2004 empowers the Home Secretary to make regulations to stop "hard case support" for refused asylum seekers conditional on performance of community work. Such "hard case support" is



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currently available under Section 4 of the 1999 Act. Refused asylum seekers/families who are unable to return home because of circumstances beyond their control (e.g. they are stateless, ill or where the country of origin is too dangerous to return!) will all be affected.

On the 1 December NASS inspired pilot schemes began in Manchester, Leeds/Bradford and parts of London. Section 10 has been condemned by the Joint Committee on Human Rights of the House of Lords (14<sup>th</sup> Report session 2003/4). NGO's have also started a campaign to oppose this measure.

More information from:

No-One is Illegal ~ [www.noii.org.uk](http://www.noii.org.uk)

Home Office ~ [www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk)

### **UK – more leave than return**

According to the Office of National Statistics (04.11.04) more British people emigrated in 2003 than any time since the 1979s. 190,000 British people left and approximately 105,000 returned in the same year, a net outflow of 85,000 people!

### **UK NGO's set out principles for a fair asylum system**

Eleven refugee, human rights and legal organisations have published a working paper, "Refugees – Renewing the Vision", which sets out fundamental principles for a fair asylum system. The report is a joint effort of Refugee Council, Amnesty International, Immigration Advisory Service, Immigration Law Practitioners' Association, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, Justice, Medical Foundation for the Care of the Victims of Torture, Oxfam GB, Refugee Action, Refugee Legal Centre and the Scottish Refugee Council.

The working paper outlines an approach to the asylum system based on ensuring protection to those who need it. This includes a fast-track recognition scheme for asylum-seekers who are clearly refugees and a more independent decision-

making process. It also examines the global causes for refugee movement. For a copy of the paper contact Refugee Council on 020 7820 3042 or read it online at: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

### **House of Commons International Development Committee Report on Migration – Migration and Development: How to make migration work for poverty reduction**

This powerful report dispels myths about "floods" and "swamps" of migrants heading for the developed countries. In fact, the Committee argues, like refugees, most migrants move within and between developing countries.

The Committee also argues that legal migration would benefit both sending and receiving countries and that "well managed migration" is important for both economic and political reasons. The report points out that, remittances by international migrants originally from developing countries, amount to almost \$300 billion. Such funds, if invested wisely, could play a major role in reducing poverty in developing countries.

Developed countries are criticised for "providing aid to developing countries while helping themselves to the nurses, doctors and teachers who prop up services in developed countries." The report appreciates the UK Government's attempts to open up channels for legal migration, but calls for greater protection for migrants through legislation and enforcement. It warns that if public confidence in the government's migration policy is to be maintained, then asylum claims must be examined fairly and quickly, otherwise public support for economic migration would wane.

**On 9 December 2004, CRN organised a Round Table on the Report with Church leaders, MPs, academics and activists. The Round Table was held at Westminster Abbey and a Press Statement followed. See enclosure for the full**



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**statement – “No EU country has ratified the International Migrant Workers Convention, 1990”.**

### **EUROPEAN UNION (EU)**

#### **The rise and rise of a Common European Asylum System**

The development of ‘an area of freedom, security and justice’ has been going on for 5 years since the EU summit in Tampere, Finland. The building blocks for a common asylum system were agreed to meet the May 2004 deadline i.e. the Temporary Protection Directive, Asylum Reception Directive, Refugee Qualification Directive, Asylum Procedure Directive and the Dublin 11 Regulation.

The next 5 year stage was agreed at the EU summit on 5 November 2004. The main proposals in the Dutch Presidency’s “Hague Programme” includes giving up unanimity from 1 April 2005 for decisions on asylum, illegal immigration and border policy, as well as commitment to give the EU a truly shared asylum policy by 2010.

#### **European Commission**

The new EU Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs is Franco Frattini from Italy. He replaces Rocco Buttiglione, whose nomination was rejected by the European Parliament.

#### **Deaths at sea**

Up to 4,000 people drown attempting to get into Europe every year, according to a newly published research by Professor Michael Pugh of Plymouth University. In the Mediterranean alone about 2,000 perish annually. His research was based on interviews with refugees, records of bodies washed ashore, boat wrecks and government statistics.

Further information: [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

#### **Number of asylum seekers in industrialised countries at lowest level for seventeen years**

In 20 of the EU member states for which data is available, the decrease in asylum applications was on average 7% compared to the first half of 2004 and a fall of 16% compared to the first half of 2003, a figure which hides important differences, namely a 20% fall in 14 of the “old” Member States and an increase of 31% in the new. Despite an 11% fall compared to the first quarter, France received the largest number of asylum seekers (14,050), followed by (after the USA, where it fell slightly), the United Kingdom and Germany (it fell in both countries) and in Austria (an increase of 11%, following a 24% fall in the previous quarter).

In the new Members States there had been a 26% increase in applications in the second half of 2004 compared to the first quarter: especially in Cyprus (mostly from Bangladeshis who initially enter with student visas), in Slovakia and in Poland, whereas in the Czech Republic, applications fell.

### **WORLD**

#### **Landmine Ban Treaty – 5 year review**

Delegates to the first 5 year review of the 1997 Landmine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Convention) met in Nairobi this month to agree a new plan of action for the next five years. Attention was once again focused on mine clearance, stockpile destruction and improved care for victims of land mines, especially refugee returnees.

Delegates also reaffirmed their commitment to the 1997 Ottawa Convention to ban the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of landmines by signing a declaration. The UN secretary general described the meeting as “a success story”. To date, 144 countries have ratified the Convention, but 41 countries have not, including the US, Russia and China. *More information from the Campaign Against Arms Trade on 020 7281 0297.*

#### **Crisis in Sudan**

Ethnic violence continues in Sudan, affecting more than 2 million people who were forced to



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flee their lives and homes to temporary camps in Darfur, Western Sudan. The World Health Organisation says more than 70,000 have died since March 2004. Only 900 of the 3,300 monitors promised by the African Union to maintain the ceasefire between the government and the rebels are in place.

The UN secretary general said last week that Darfur "is in chaos, subject to banditry, rape and village burnings, the situation is desperate". Meanwhile, Save the Children suspended relief operations in South Darfur because of the targeting of aid workers. *More information from CAFOD (020 7733 7900) and Christian Aid (020 7620 4444).*

### **Sri Lanka, violence renews**

The Sri Lanka Democracy Forum issued a statement 10 December 2004 expressing grave concern about the increasing number of violent incidents in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka. It called on the government and the LTTE Tigers to show restraint and respect the terms of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA). It called on the International Community and especially Norway, given its role in securing and monitoring the terms of the CFA, to demand an end to the violence.

*More information on: [www.lankademocracy.org](http://www.lankademocracy.org)*

## **CAMPAIGNS AND RESOURCES**

### **18 December: International Migrants Day (IMD)\***

A special event with food, live music, dance and poetry will be held in London to celebrate IMD. The event organised by the TUC *et al* will be held in Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square WC1R.

*For tickets contact Don Flynn on 020 7608 7305.*

*\*IMD is an international movement campaigning to get IMD marked worldwide. It is led by December 18, a migrant workers organisation. Check [www.december18.net](http://www.december18.net) for details.*

The *Office for Migration Policy* (Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales) has published: ***The Dispossessed: The Catholic Church's Concern for Refugees and Migrants.*** The book explores the Catholic Church's foundational documents and social teaching on refugees. *For copies contact Primavera Quantrill on 020 7901 4809.*

*The Winchester Visitors Group* has set up a scheme whereby churches and other institutions can sponsor asylum seekers for 12 weeks at £70 per week with the possibility of renewal. This will cover rent in the most basic room and leave a minimum for subsistence. The Winchester Society of Friends has already sponsored one asylum seeker. For more information contact: *Hugh Wood, Molescroft, Lainston Close, Winchester on 01962 86913.*

*The National Catholic Refugee Forum* exists to facilitate networking, sharing and solidarity among Christians, other faith groups and refugee communities who are working with and for refugees. In November, NCRF held a day conference on 'Refugees and Conflict'. *For the report on the conference and more information contact: Mary Horbury on 01244 317627.*

*The London-based Inter-Faith Refugee Network* exists to support and develop practical faith-based responses to the needs of people seeking asylum. *For more information contact Revd Chris Brice on 020 7932 1121.*

*Solicitors International Human Rights Group* will soon be established to bring together solicitors legal skills in the battle for human rights. *For more information contact Michael Ellman on 07813 813362.*

*The Ethics and Politics of Asylum* by Matthew Gibney draws upon political and ethical theory and a review of the asylum policies of the US, UK, Germany and Australia, and asks why asylum has become such a charged issue in these countries.



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*Copies from the Cambridge University Press on  
01223 326050.*

*Jesuit Refugee Service – Europe has published a  
report on the ‘**Detention of asylum seekers in  
Europe**’. The report has an overview of detention  
centres in Europe and uncovers the discrepancies  
between what is legally permissible and what  
happens in practice. Copies available from JRS  
UK on 020 7357 0974*

*Refugee Study Centre (Oxford University)  
Dates of Public Seminars on: [www.rsc.ox.ac.uk](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk)*

*Detention Advice Service has moved office to Unit  
B3, 62 Beechwood Road, London E8 3DY  
Tel: 020 7254 6888*

**This is a CRN newsletter.**

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