



A LENT REFLECTION

Each year Lent gives us an opportunity to reflect on the “day of salvation” (*cf.* 2 Cor 6:2). From God we come, to God we return. We pray that this journey may be lived both as a time for conversion to God and love of our ‘neighbours.’ Lent calls us to a complete change of heart and mind in order that we may hear the Lord’s voice inviting us to turn to him in newness of life and to make ourselves ever more sensitive to the suffering of those around us, particularly the painful reality of all those who flee persecution, who suffer generalised violence and are internally displaced and those ‘forced’ to leave their collapsing economies. We remember environmental refugees, victims of natural disasters particularly those who perished and those who were displaced by the recent Tsunami.

**LET US NOT PASS BY ON THE OTHER SIDE
FOR WE PRAY IN JESUS NAME
AMEN**

NATIONAL

European Union (EU) directive on asylum seekers right to work

The EU Directive on Reception Standards for Asylum Seekers came into force in February. The Directive provides for asylum seekers who waited for more than a year for an initial decision, the right to seek permission to work. In the UK an asylum seeker’s right to work concession (after a wait of six months) was abolished by the then home minister Beverly Hughes on 23rd July 2002.

However, in a statement, the Home Office said that “*although the employment concession for asylum seekers was abolished, we retain discretion to allow asylum seekers to work. The discretion is exercised sparingly but might be appropriate in cases where asylum seekers, through no fault of theirs, waited for longer than 12 months for an initial decision...*”

(*Hansard, 15th January*) also see:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhansard.htm

NGO Panel looks at asylum trauma

A North East people’s tribunal is to be held over the way refused asylum seekers are being removed from the region. Secretary Pete Wadlinski of the North East Coalition for Asylum Rights said: “*The immigration service’s procedures are ripping apart communities, people removed were only allowed to take a 20kg suitcases.*”

Mr Wadlinski continued, “*Some of them have been here for three or four years; children are not being given the chance to say goodbye and it’s traumatic for teachers and pupils when a child simply doesn’t turn up one day, local people are also becoming affected by all this. Too many of these removals are carried out by immigration officers accompanied by police officers in early morning raids.*”

Pete Wadlinski wants to hear from human rights and immigration lawyers, religious and community leaders to help form a panel of experts to take evidence for a report to be submitted to the Home Office. A Home Office spokesperson said: “*The government has made it clear that it will take a robust approach to removing people from the country where they have no right to be here.*”

More information from Pete Wadlinski on 07910 218622.

Meanwhile, the National Coalition Against Deportation reported a steep rise in calls from schools and teachers about immigration and police officers removing children from classrooms – in all cases, the parents were not present. This is in clear breach of Home Office’s own guidelines on ‘Family Removal Policy.’

More information from: www.ncade.org.uk

Asylum figures continue to fall

According to the latest Home Office figures the number of asylum seekers coming to the UK continues to fall from 49,000 in 2003 to 34,000 in 2004 - representing a drop of 64% since a high of 84,130 in 2002. The government claims that the drop in asylum claims is as a result of its clamp down on unfounded asylum claims and stringent removals rates of around 50% of refused asylum seekers. Improved border security has also helped. But this is



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only partly true refugee NGO's claim; the drop, they argue is also a result of diminishing wars and conflicts around the world.

Top five arrival nationalities: Iran, China, Iraq, Somalia and Zimbabwe

Source: Home Office: www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

The Government's five year strategy for asylum and immigration

On 8th February, the government launched a five year strategy for asylum and immigration called 'Controlling our Borders: Making Immigration work for Britain.'

The key changes: Low skilled migrants not allowed to settle; skilled workers to speak English and pass a "Britishness test"; more asylum seekers to be detained to speed up asylum determination; more asylum seekers to be tagged with reporting requirements; immigrants fingerprinted to ensure departure when visas expire; increased removal of refused asylum seekers and those considered 'illegal'; Australian-style points system to make it easier for highly skilled migrants to enter the UK; £200 fines for those caught employing 'illegals' and removal of indefinite leave to remain on acquiring refugee status (the expectation is return for those with status, if conditions in country of origin improve after 5 years!)

"We would be very concerned if someone who has been accepted as a refugee has to live through five years of uncertainty until the UK Government confirms they can remain here permanently," said Maeve Sherlock, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council.

More information from: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

The Stationary Office (020 7242 6393)

<http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop>

Government responds to Commons report on migration

The government published its response to the House of Commons International Development Committee's report on Migration and Development. The government concedes that the contribution made by

migrants to the UK economy and society has been enormous. The government estimates that in 1999/2000 migrants made a net contribution of £2.5bn to the UK economy and paid 10% more in taxes than they received in public services. The government says it's committed to managed migration 'within strict criteria' but reiterated that it will not ratify the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of all Migrants and their Families. In the government's view this would create an unnecessary "pull factor".

For more information:

The Stationary Office (020 7242 6393)

www.tso.co.uk/bookshop or

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmintdev/163/163.pdf

EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

New EU directive on expulsions/returns policy expected in spring.

The *European Voice* (3-9 February 2005) reported the European Commission's intention to publish a new directive on Minimum Standards for the expulsion/return of refused asylum seekers and migrants without status in spring 2005.

Franco Frattini, the new EU Commissioner for Justice, Security and Freedom said that plans are afoot to set aside €15m to promote cooperation between Member States on expulsions, boost the role of Immigration Liaison Officers and representatives of Member States posted in countries of origin. The scheme, it is hoped will evolve into a European Returns Fund. This new proposal is based on an earlier one from the previous Commissioner, Antonio Vitorino, to extend the existing European Refugee Fund (used for integration purposes) for expulsions and returns.

For more information: www.europeanvoice.com

European Commission (EC) Green Paper on managed migration

The EC has issued a Green Paper on managed migration. The paper a consultation document is also intended to trigger debate on rules for admitting



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economic migrants and the added value of adopting a fresh framework on migrants. The commission invites all interested parties to respond to this paper by 15 April 2005.

More information on:

http://europe.eu.in/comm./justice_home/news/consulting_public_en.htm

INTERNATIONAL

Cartegena (refugee) Declaration 1984 – though designed principally to protect and help the victims of civil wars in Central America, it in fact did much more. In the intervening 20 years, its ideals were incorporated into national legislation throughout Latin America and became a major building block in the UNHCR's overall protection mandate. Cartegena broke new ground for several areas of international refugee protection. Compared with the main instrument, the 51 Refugee Convention, Cartegena, expanded the categories of uprooted people eligible for refugee status. It tackled the issue of internally displaced persons; family reunification and helping uprooted people start life anew in asylum countries. It firmly reiterated the fundamental principles of the voluntary return of any refugee electing to go home and the absolute *non-refoulement* (the prohibition of forced return) of asylum seekers

More information from: www.unhcr.ch

World Council of Churches (WCC) slams UK asylum policies

Towards the end of the WCC central committee meeting in Geneva, 15-22 February, a statement was issued critical of the draconian asylum policies of the main political parties in the UK, especially on the question of the arbitrary detention of 'undocumented migrants' and asylum seekers. The statement however appreciated the UK government's efforts to focus on Africa's economic development.

The statement comes after a number of recent criticisms of asylum policy by Church leaders and Church bodies in the UK. Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, Chairman of the Office for Migration Policy, Catholic Bishop Conference of England and

Wales recently attacked the two main political parties over their 'bidding war' on immigration and asylum triggered by the looming general election. The Churches Commission for Racial Justice also criticised the Tory leader Michael Howard's pledge to withdraw from the 51 UN Refugee Convention if elected, as both 'alarming and dangerous'.

More information from Office for Migration Policy on 020 7901 4962/4865.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

is observed annually on 21 March. On that day, in 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against the apartheid "pass laws" in Sharpsville, South Africa. Proclaiming the day in 1966, the UN's general assembly called on the international community to redouble efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

More information on:

<http://www.unhchr.ch/htm/menu2/6/cerd.htm>

Commission for Racial Equality, 020 7939 0000, www.crc.gov.uk

March 21 is also the international day of direct action against the arms trade.

In more than 36 countries around the world, children are the innocent victims of armed conflicts. Vast numbers are maimed, raped or slaughtered. 6m children have been injured and 2m have died in the last decade due to war, while 10,000 are victims of landmines every year and 10m are refugees.

More information on: www.dsei.org

International Women's Day 2005

Amnesty International is to launch a global campaign to stop violence against women in the run-up to International Women's Day 8 March. Among the highlights of the campaign will be one on 'violence against women during times of conflict' especially the question of 'rape and sexual violence as weapons of war.'

More information from: www.amnesty.org.uk/svaw/



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CAMPAIGNS AND RESOURCES

Refugee Week 2005

Refugee Week will be held from 20-26 June this year to coincide with World Refugee Day. For those who are not aware, this week is an opportunity to celebrate the positive contribution refugees make to the UK. It also gives an opportunity to reflect and raise awareness as to why people seek protection in the UK and why people become refugees. The theme for Refugee Week is Persecution as part of the current UNHCR's three year theme on the Global causes for forced migration and displacement – the fundamental definition in the 51 UN Refugee Convention which protects the rights of people seeking asylum.

More information from: Refugee Week Team 020 7820 3105 or www.refugeeweek.org.uk

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY got the unanimous support of the Conference of Religious in England and Wales when it met in January at its annual conference in Swanwick. To this end CoR mandates the Executive to: register the CoR as a participant in the campaign and actively support and promote the campaign on behalf of members. They also agreed to register individual members as participants in the campaign and encourage the full participation of individual members and congregations in the activities of the campaign.

More information: <http://www.corew.org/justice/cn/>

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY is calling for trade justice, debt cancellation and more aid for the world's poorest countries. The Global Week of Action on Trade is on 10-16 April.

More information on: <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org>

Beijing+10: International Conference for women's human rights

The UN will be hosting a ten year review of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) called Beijing +10 in New York from 28 February – 11 March 2005 in recognition of women's rights as being integral to human rights. Government and civil society organisation representatives will discuss 12 areas of

concern including child/women trafficking, violence against women and recognition of refugee women and girls and the special protection needs that reflect their gender.

More information: Women Resource Centre 020 7426 9643 or email Isabel@wrc.org.uk

Negative effects of Dispersal Policy (on treatment of asylum seekers with HIV/Aids), Tuesday 1 March 6.30pm, refreshments 6pm onwards; St John's Parish Church, Church Row, Hampstead, London NW3; Speaker: Dr Sarah Creighton (University College Hospital & Camden Primary Care Trust)

More information from Chris Brice on 020 7932 1121.

Refugees and Asylum Seeking Women: Challenges, Changes and Choices – A conference, organised by the Refugee Council and supported by the UNHCR, to raise awareness about the barriers to protection facing women seeking asylum and women refugees will take place on Wednesday, 23 March 2005 at Regent's College, London.

More information from Refugee Council, www.refugeecouncil.org.uk or the Training and Events Officer on 020 7820 3049.

Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre (Hilary Term 2005 Public Seminars) The Ethics and Politics of Migration and Displacements. Convenor Dr Matthew Gibney.

More information: www.rsc.ox.ac.uk or email rscm@ox.ac.uk

No One is Illegal - a group of academics and activists started work in 2003 with a manifesto against immigration controls. The manifesto examines controls historically and politically to show why they are inherently racist and why there cannot be "fair or non-racist" controls. The group has attracted worldwide attention and increasing support appears to be coming from Germany, France and Spain. The group hopes to work with NO BORDER groups in North America, Russia and Australia. A conference was held in Spring 2004 which attracted



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considerable support. A recall conference is expected in 2005.

More information: www.noii.org.uk or email info@noii.org.uk

Dover migrant's deaths – 58 remembered appeal fund

On 18 June 2000 the bodies of 58 migrant men and women were found in a lorry on arrival at Dover. This tragedy was a wake-up call to the shocking conditions often endured by migrants who in desperation entrust their lives to people traffickers. This year marks the 5th anniversary of the tragedy. Many feel that a permanent memorial on the Dover seafront would be appropriate. Individuals, groups and faith communities are invited to contribute to the cost of a plaque.

More information from Revd Norman Setchell of the Asylum Seekers Support Group on 01843 868033 or the Appeals Chairperson, Geoffrey Lear on 01304 852881.

People Trafficking – Hidden Health Concerns

The trafficking and smuggling of people is no doubt of global concern and the nature and pressures that drive and influence trafficking are complex. The complexities of the reasons for these sort of movements, the people affected, routes and methods of smuggling make broad generalisations difficult. However according to the International Organisation of Migrants, in terms of health there are some common issues that can be defined, including serious illness – physical and mental – injury and death.

For information on IOM's Newsletter on the subject: email iuri@iom.int

Campaign on access to HIV services for all migrants to the UK

This campaign is supported by the Africa HIV Policy Network, the All Parliamentary Group on AIDS, Citizens Advice, JCWI, National AIDS Trust, and the Terrence Higgins Trust et al. It calls on the Government to amend the NHS (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations in order to exempt HIV treatment and care from NHS charges. Campaigners believe that maintenance of a free initial health

assessment for all in primary care, to establish need and levels of urgency and treatment, is essential. Prior to these new NHS regulations of April 2004, the NHS allowed treatment for asylum seekers and all who lived in the UK for more than 12 months. The current regulation which removes this right is a danger to both individuals and public health.

For more information contact Lisa Power, lisa.power@tht.org.uk or Yusef Azad, yusef.azad@nat.org.uk

Asylum and Immigration: A Christian perspective on a polarised debate

by Nick Spencer, available from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, priced £7.99.

More information on 020 7399 9555.

No Place for a Child – children in UK detention:

This study by Heaven Crawley and Trine Lester for **Save the Children** examines the experience children who are detained for immigration purposes. It explores the impact of detention on children, the alternatives to detention and the safeguards that are necessary to prevent detention becoming prolonged and that the *Rights of the Child* are always held as paramount. The government say that detention is a last resort and affects a small number of children for a short time. But this report found that circa 2000 children a year are detained with their families or as a result of age disputes; in some cases for up to 9 months.

More information from: www.savethechildren.org.uk

A Place of Refugee: A positive approach to asylum seekers and refugees in the UK – a report commissioned by the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council – reflects on the background of misinformation, ignorance and media bias in the debate on asylum and in policy formulation; and the call of God to show compassion to the marginalised.

More information from: Church House Publishing, Great Smith Street, LONDON SW1P 3NZ.



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The Gore Lecture 2005

Charles Gore (1853-1932) a canon at Westminster Abbey was noted for his belief in Christian doctrine with a progressive agenda for social reform. The Gore Lecture follows this tradition. This year's Gore Lecture was given by Revd Nicholas Sagovsky, the Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey, on '*Faith in Asylum – a theological critique of UK's asylum policy.*'

For a text of the lecture, visit www.westminster-abbey.org or contact Avril Bottoms on 020 7654 4805 for details.

Amnesty Founder dies

Peter Benenson, the lawyer-activist who founded Amnesty International in 1961, died on 26th February in Oxford, after a long illness. His contribution to human rights was incomparable. It is because of him we now have international conventions such as the one on torture and the International Criminal Court. Today Amnesty is in its 44th year and is the largest independent human rights organisation with over 1.8m members worldwide.

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