



Jean Lambert MEP
Green Party Member of the European Parliament for London

Monday 7 January 2019

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP,
Secretary of State for the Home Department,
Home Office,
2 Marsham Street,
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary,

Re: Upholding the rights of refugees who cross the English Channel

Last week, you asked: "If you are a genuine asylum seeker why have you not sought asylum in the first safe country that you arrived in?"

As an MEP who has worked on asylum issues for almost 20 years, I can offer an insight into why people are prepared to risk their lives, crossing the Channel in a leaky rubber dinghy, to reach the UK.

Why are refugees coming to the UK?

Some asylum seekers have family members or close friends here in the UK, and are willing to put themselves in harm's way to be reunited. Many speak English, and hope that their language skills will help them integrate into their new home, find work, and contribute to society.

Others have received an extremely hostile welcome in Europe - whether left to languish in a squalid camp in Greece without adequate medical care, or forced to squat in a disused building in Italy. In northern France, just 21 miles from UK shores, refugees are exposed to regular police violence and brutality - their tents seized, their bones broken, and their faces sprayed with teargas.

While these countries may be considered 'safe' for lucky individuals such as you or I, they are not always safe places for people who are forced to flee their homes and arrive in Europe via irregular routes.

Greens in the European Parliament

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The UK has consistently sought to project an image of itself as a place where human rights will be upheld and defended. You, as Home Secretary, have a moral duty to ensure this is the case.

How should the Home Office respond?

Firstly, the response to this incident must be proportionate. While some 312 refugees arrived on the coast of Kent in small boats in 2018, a total of 116,295 arrived by sea to Italy, Greece, Spain and Cyprus. Tragically, more than 2,000 didn't make it - reported dead or missing. These stark figures make it clear there is no 'refugee crisis' in the UK, and Home Office rhetoric must reflect this.

Secondly, if the Home Office truly prioritises the safety of people making these dangerous journeys, it should take full advantage of its resettlement schemes - currently the only safe, legal routes to claim asylum here in the UK.

It is extremely alarming that only 20 unaccompanied children have been resettled in the UK over the past two years under the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme, which allows for the transfer of 3,000 vulnerable young people from conflict zones. Meanwhile the Dubs scheme sits collecting dust, having transferred just 220 of its target 480 children to safe homes here in the UK.

The UK can and should do better than this, as evidenced by the resounding success of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, which has found new homes for nearly 14,000 people displaced by the conflict in Syria.

Additionally, the UK could show solidarity with the EU Member States who are under particular pressure, such as Greece, Italy and Spain. There is no requirement under the Dublin III Regulation to return people to the first 'safe' country they arrived in - a Member State can say it will deal with the claim of asylum seekers who have moved on, rather than return them. The UK could also have offered to participate in the EU's relocation proposals, which would have helped reduce the waiting time for a decision on an individual's asylum application, rather than forcing them to put their lives on hold in camps in refugee camps.

Finally, the Home Office needs to think innovatively in order to prevent vulnerable people dying at sea. For example, it could introduce a humanitarian visa system - as the European Parliament voted to establish last month - which would allow asylum seekers to apply for visas at embassies and consulates, rather than embarking on treacherous journeys in rickety boats.

I enclose two of the Greens/EFA's recent publications on these issues:

- 1) **The Green Alternative to the Dublin System** (*which has helped inform the European Parliament's proposals for a revised Dublin system*)
- 2) **The EU-Turkey Statement and the Greek Hotspots** (*which helps explain why some asylum seekers feel they cannot stay in their first country of arrival, and sets out our proposals for a new, humane EU asylum policy*)

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As Brexit threatens to tear this country apart at the seams, the arrival of a few hundred asylum seekers in Dover does not constitute a 'major incident' for the UK. It is, however, a 'major incident' for the people who have risked their lives to reach our shores. It's time that UK policy reflected that.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jean Lambert', with a horizontal line underneath it.

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