



**REFUGEE CRISIS:
SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE**

3rd December 2015

Report



Islington Refugee Forum organised a meeting on 3rd December 2015 concerning the Refugee Crisis. It was attended by 22 people and was hosted by experts from organisations which are active in Islington as well as speakers from the council. Cllr. Richard Watts, Leader of Islington Council; Dr Lisa Doyle, Head of Advocacy from The Refugee Council; Anuska Casas Pinto, London Outreach Manager from Refugee Action; Jacqueline Broadhead, Corporate Policy and Equality Manager from Islington Council, Ratip Alsulaimen, Co-ordinator of The British Syrian Education Centre and Dashty Jamal, Co-ordinator of the Federation of Iraqi Refugees. The aim of the meeting was to raise awareness about the challenges that refugees face and what the refugee organisations might offer to support their needs. The meeting provided an opportunity for Islington Council to inform participants about current developments regarding the arrival of new refugees following the last meeting on 14th October. The speakers addressed a number of issues concerning newly arrived refugees.

Cllr. Richard Watts explained that migration is the biggest issue and challenge of the 21st century. Despite the fact that the UK has always been accepting of refugees fleeing conflict, there is still a great deal of work to do. However, Islington is part of The Gateway Protection Program, so according to Richard we are very much moving in the right direction. He explained that the most crucial issue is housing for refugees, because refugees are victims of budget cuts. Therefore we should intensify our work for the fair treatment of refugees. Richard emphasized that we need to do more for refugees especially after the Paris attack because people feel unsafe and insecure. That situation has had a big impact on the refugee debate in the UK but we should totally reject the concept that all refugees are terrorists. He concluded that refugees are part of our society.



Cllr. Richard Watts, the Leader of Islington Council.

Lisa Doyle, Head of Advocacy from The Refugee Council, stated that currently we have created a generally hostile environment around refugees which causes them to feel unwelcome. It is important that we provide them with the protection and safety they seek. She mentioned that initially it was an unambitious program – the government wanted to resettle only 5,000 people so we pushed that we have to do more. Now the pledged relocation of Syrian refugees in the UK has been expanded to 20,000. Whilst David Cameron agreed to take 20,000 during the course of the next five years, budget cuts were occurring for the support of refugees. Lisa stated that 36 asylum seekers have been accepted into Britain, but she added that we must do more – not only after the tragic images which the media portrayed of the refugee boy on the beach. In her opinion, it will be more politically damaging if the government does not respond. Lisa highlighted that these days we have a global refugee crisis and that it is necessary to stand by the principle of protection. We cannot create a negative narrative about refugees and judge them before looking at their applications. We should urge people to create an ongoing conversation which will represent the beginning of the government’s pledge to bring in thousands of refugees next year. Only joint effort can bring changes in policy and ensure appropriate asylum support. Lisa concluded that we need to develop a proper integration system.



Lisa Doyle, Head of Advocacy from The Refugee Council.

Anuska Casas Pinto from Refugee Action painted a clear picture of the refugee situation worldwide. So far 50 million people are currently fleeing their homes due to conflict, half of them children, 8 million are internally fleeing and from 400,000 fleeing Syria, Turkey and Pakistan have taken the most refugees. 4,000 people have already died trying to flee the conflict. Anuska said that every country should respond to this and create programs adjusted to the scale of this phenomenon. More places are needed, which should not be exclusive to refugees fleeing Syria. Everyone needs legal aid and support which is why an asylum decision system should be approved immediately. She mentioned that we have to be sure that we ask new refugees what their needs are. Anuska stated that instead of segregation, activities should focus on integration. Independence is very important for the successful integration of refugees. She concluded that social inclusion leads to a sense of belonging which is why we need detailed feedback from refugees.



Anuska Casas Pinto from Refugee Action.

Jacqueline Broadhead from Islington Council (Corporate Policy and Equality Manager) demonstrated in her presentation why the expansion to accept up to 20,000 refugees in the UK will prove a logistical challenge, particularly for key organisations such as UNHCR, the Home Office and many local councils. She emphasized that for councils the biggest challenge is housing. Islington Council is responsible for preparing offers to future refugees to accommodate them in Islington. This approach should be personalised because re-settlement work is an extremely difficult time for each refugee. Jacqueline concluded that support services are the basis for building a strong society.



Jacqueline Broadhead from Islington Council (Corporate Policy and Equality Manager)

Ratip Alsulaimen, Co-ordinator of the British Syrian Education Centre focused on the negative aspects of war. In his opinion war doesn't solve anything – both sides lose. He highlighted the point that many more refugees need to be rescued because bombs attacks are badly affecting innocent citizens. Ratip referred to the media which should share real information and reflect the whole society portrayed not only from a negative perspective. He talked about the Syrians' particular situation – whilst most of them are highly educated, they are still unable to find work. He added that people in Syria have no choice, they are caught between two evils, and they are forced to flee, leaving home and everything behind. In conclusion, Ratip said that every human being's life is precious; every loss of a human being is a loss of a precious life, no matter where they come from.



Ratip Alsulaimen, Co-ordinator of from the British Syrian Education Centre

Dashty Jamal, Co-ordinator of the Federation of Iraqi Refugees talked about the necessity of successful campaigns on behalf of refugees. Campaigning should focus on activities against racism. In his presentation, he mentioned that Iraq and Kurdistan are portrayed by the media as unsafe and inadvisable to visit. Dashty added that the new wave of refugees is coming and we should put pressure on the UK government regarding their immigration policy. He claimed that now western governments are purely self-seeking and avoiding taking their fair share of responsibility in accepting and resettling refugees in the nearest possible future.



Dashty Jamal, Co-ordinator of the Federation of Iraqi Refugees.

In conclusion, the speakers put their message across that refugees should be treated fairly. In particular following the Paris attacks, more work needs to be done to show that refugees are not terrorists. Given the scale of the refugee crisis, there is a necessity to advocate and lobby the government to bring in more refugees this year and to stand by the principle of protection. The meeting emphasised the importance of providing housing, education, and meeting the psychological well-being needs for refugees who have been subjected to the trauma of war. More places are needed including legal aid and ensuring that every aspect of appropriate asylum support is provided as important elements for building a strong society. The meeting concluded that a proper integration system, instead of segregation, is important for both refugees and the wider society.