

Date: 18 December 2021

On International Migrants Day, we stand together with all those calling upon Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Priti Patel, Home Secretary of the United Kingdom & members of the British Parliament to reconsider the UK's migration policies in light of the continuing tragic loss of life in the English Channel

Dear Boris Johnson, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Priti Patel, Home Secretary & all members of British Parliament,

On International Migrants Day 2021, we demand action from the Prime Minister and Home Secretary of the United Kingdom to reconsider its approach towards migration on a global level and towards its border policing which only drives desperate and vulnerable migrants further into the hands of traffickers and exacerbates the tragic loss of life on our shores and in our waters.

Many of the creators of this letter are all proud descendants of migrants. While our stories of migration may differ, we all share a collective narrative stemming from our forebearers. This was imagining a better future through hope. Hope is constitutive to most aspects of human life. As the saying goes – hope dies last.

Tragically, on 24 November 2021, 27 migrants' hope was lost. 17 men, 7 women – 1 of whom was pregnant – and 3 children drowned in UK waters trying to reach a more hopeful future. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has recorded this incident as the largest single loss of life in the Channel since it started collecting data on missing migrants in 2014.

Following the announcement of the deaths, it has been revealed that some of the relatives of those that died tracked the boat online in real-time and have claimed it reached UK maritime territory before stopping. A spokesperson for HM Coastguard stated in the media 90 alerts were received from the Channel, yet it only joined search operations after bodies were seen floating.

It begs the question of whether these deaths could have been prevented if the frantic distress calls were responded to sooner.

The 27 people that tragically drowned, hoped for a better future. They hoped for a better life, for better security, for better human rights, for better stability.

No one puts themselves and their children in an inflatable dinghy to travel an unknown route unless the boat offers more safety and hope than the land they leave behind.

Migration is manifested as a result of local and global networks of opportunities, which are largely exploited by criminal groups. These groups place people in the greatest danger with human life being the stake. Smugglers are happy and prepared to take the largest risks in crossing borders by exploiting the extreme border policing approaches that the UK government imposes.

If the government is serious about preventing people smuggling to protect human life, to reduce cost, to deter smugglers from benefitting from gambling with people's lives, they need to rethink their approach to border patrol and provide easier and safer routes to seek asylum.

The new Nationality and Borders bill only creates more treacherous risks to migrants, vulnerable women and children. Punishment is certainly not the answer as the most vulnerable will pay the biggest price.

We believe that every person who makes Britain their home has the capacity to make the country a better place.

We demand the following action:

1. The Government rethinks the Nationality and Borders bill. While Ministers have asserted that the measures included are aimed at cutting costs, breaking people-smuggling gangs, and protecting people seeking asylum, the Bill fails to deliver on all these. On the contrary, proposed new powers for the UK Border Force to direct vessels out of UK territorial waters potentially endanger human life in breach of the UK's international duties to protect life at sea. Further to this, the Bill undermines the 1951 Refugee Convention by creating a two-tier asylum system that penalises refugees because they had no choice but to enter the UK irregularly.
2. The Government ensures asylum seekers and migrants are aware of their legal options and are protected from the risks arising from trafficking, torture, and loss of life. Efforts should also be increased to identify and protect the most vulnerable, especially unaccompanied children. The amendment proposed by Lord Alf Dubs, which was designed to ensure that the Government would continue to allow unaccompanied and separated refugee children in Europe the opportunity to be reunited with family members here in the UK after BREXIT, should be reinstated in the new Bill.
3. The Government promotes border cooperation that is balanced, proportionate, respects human rights, and is part of a larger, comprehensive response that ensures

the UK and other countries in the Global North give refuge to their fair share of the global refugee population.

4. The Government opens more safe avenues for refugees and those in humanitarian need to enable them to make a home in the UK, including environmental migrants who have lost their homes due to climate-related events. These must include a wider, more comprehensive refugee resettlement scheme and opportunities for those in need to come and work in the UK's labour market.
5. The Government revisits its New Plan for Immigration to open up safer, legal pathways for those who can contribute their skills to the UK across the labour market sector, redressing the shortages in various sectors ranging across the NHS, care sector, hospitality, and catering industries.
6. The Government takes a more holistic approach to migration, by addressing the factors that drive people to these desperate measures. This includes reinstating overseas development aid from 0.5% to the statutory 0.7% of the UK's gross national income and investing in development and humanitarian responses abroad.
7. Lastly, the Government acknowledges that the Nationality and Borders Bill discriminates against the UK's Black and Minority Ethnic communities through proposed powers to strip UK citizenship without notice from British nationals. These powers will disproportionately affect Black and Minority Ethnic communities, most of whom have access to a second citizenship.

The British government needs to take a stronger stance in protecting the most vulnerable of people, our migrant brothers and sisters, to protect their human rights, to offer safety and lead by example in showing compassion and respect when tackling the rhetoric against asylum seekers and migrants.

Without generations of migrants, the UK would be shattered. Our country would hold less innovation, our economy would be weakened, we would have a less skilled work force and the multiculturalism of the UK would be extinguished, putting our society into darkness.

It's time to act before more lives are unnecessarily lost and in hope for building a better future for everyone.

Signed,

Re-Balance

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