

Monday 21st
March 2022

Greater Manchester Faith Community Leaders

An Open Letter to Greater Manchester MPs on the Nationality and Borders Bill

The Nationality and Borders Bill returns to the House of Commons shortly.

It will be debated in the light of the urgent contemporary need to provide safe havens for the many fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.

Proposals in the Bill would make it harder for them to seek sanctuary here.

There are other people, in similar need, especially unaccompanied children and the elderly, fleeing conflicts that are out of the public gaze right now, whether from Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea or other hotbeds of violence, persecution or personal mortal danger.

As our MPs, we hope that you would support the changes made to the Bill in the House of Lords. These make it more effective in addressing the needs of people fleeing for their lives, and the responsibilities of those who can save them.

We ask that you support amendments which:

- **End the two-tier system** – The bill proposes a differentiated approach towards refugees and asylum seekers, based on how they reached the UK. Under government plans, asylum seekers who reach the UK via ‘irregular’ routes would not have access to the same rights and support as those who come via Government schemes. This is unfair to those who are already vulnerable, and fails to recognise that many people do not have access to safe routes. Nor do they have the luxury of time to find one. They are running for their lives.
- **Support family reunion** – Family reunion is an important way of enabling unaccompanied minors to reach their family. It ensures that people can be reunited with those they love. It should be a priority in situations of conflict. We see this in the widening of Visa schemes for those travelling from Ukraine. This principle should be protected in the Bill. We ask that you support the amendment tabled by Lord Dubs, which supports it.
- **End offshore detention** – The bill seeks to change the rules for where asylum claims can first be processed, so that asylum seekers can be isolated and held apart from any local communities and even within other countries. There is a lot of evidence of how damaging this can be. They are already vulnerable because of what they are fleeing from. Isolation is bad for their health and well-being. From our own experience, we speak up for the value of integrating asylum seekers into the local community as soon as we can, supported by voluntary and community organisations and our own faith communities. We ask that you support the amendments which remove the offshoring policies in the Bill.
- **Support the implementation of safe and accessible routes to the UK** – The Government have argued that the harsh measures can be justified because there will be safe new Government approved routes to claim asylum. However, these are not currently in place and the Government have given no indication as to what they will look like. Clear targets and deadlines need to be established for getting schemes in place, which will enable the UK to take our fair share of asylum seekers, and have broad acceptance criteria in order to be accessible.

The Ukraine crisis has shed a light on the needs of all those who seek refuge from conflict and mortal danger. We need legislation that addresses them with fairness and compassion.

A Statement by Greater Manchester Faith Community Leaders, including:

Christian (Presidents of Greater Manchester Churches Together who live within Greater Manchester)

From the Church of England:

- Rt Revd David Walker (*Bishop of Manchester*)
- Rt Revd Mark Ashcroft (*Bishop of Bolton*)
- Rt Revd Mark Davies (*Bishop of Middleton*)
- Very Revd Rogers Govender M.B.E. (*Dean of Manchester*)

From the Catholic Church of England and Wales:

- Bishop John Arnold (*Bishop of Salford*)

From the Methodist Church:

- Revd Andrew Lunn (*Chair, Manchester & Stockport*)

From the Salvation Army:

- Major David Taylor (*Divisional Leader, Central North*)

From the Christhouse Bible Church:

- Bishop Theophilus Akano, (*Bishop, North Manchester, under Apostolic Pastoral Congress; Principal/Rector of Rhema Bible Institute UK*)

From the Apostolic Pastoral Congress

- Bishop Clive Whittle

Sikh

- Mr. Jagtar Singh Ajimal (*General Secretary, Indian Association Manchester*)

Faith Network 4 Manchester

- Revd Charles Kwaku-Odoi, *Co-chair*

Hindu

- Dr S Sinha (*chairperson of SGMT and committee member of Indian Senior Citizens' Centre*)
- Ms Nidhi Sinha (*Co-ordinator of Sangha*)

Jewish

- Ms Sara Radivan (*North West Regional Manager, Board of Deputies of British Jews*)
- Rabbi Reuven Silverman (*Chaplain, Manchester College and Rabbi, Manchester Reform Congregation*)
- Rabbi Robyn Ashworth Steen (*Principal Rabbi, Manchester Reform Congregation*)
- Mr David Arnold M.B.E. (*Co-chair Council of Christians and Jews, Manchester*)

Muslim

- Mr Aftab Ahmed (*Member of the Shi'a Muslim Community*)
- Mrs Nilofar Siddiqi (*Member of Sufi Muslim Community*)