



STANDING ALONGSIDE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DONCASTER

# A view from the edge

## Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

04 May 2017

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## Refugees Welcome?

By Paul FitzPatrick

It seems to have come as something of a shock to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees to discover that Britain is not as welcoming to refugees as the rhetorical claims of a proud record in hospitality suggest. Their latest report acknowledges how little time has been given to considering what happens to refugees once they have been granted protection by the UK Government, so they set out to ask to what extent refugees are welcomed in the UK. Importantly, they started by realising that protection does not end when a decision to grant refugee status is made. They wanted to examine how government policies supported refugees in the UK, and what more could be done to support communities to welcome refugees successfully. They also highlighted the impact of detention, of living for years in poverty, being banned from working and the long delays and poor quality of Home Office decision-making.

Here are some of their practical recommendations:

- introduce a cross-departmental National Refugee Integration Strategy to apply to all refugees in the UK. The strategy should learn from the positive examples which the Group learned about to coordinate support for refugees so that they are able to rebuild their lives and make full use of their talents and abilities to take part in, and contribute to, British society.
- appoint a Minister to oversee this strategy, and to ensure there is a focus on refugee policy within the Government.
- the Government extend the move on period to at least 50 days, reflecting the time it takes in reality for refugees to access accommodation and financial support, particularly as Universal Credit is rolled out nationally.



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# The resettlement programme in South Yorkshire

by Refugee Council, Sheffield

## Background

The Resettlement Programme is the UK's contribution to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) global refugees' relocation and resettlement programmes. Most refugees including Syrian refugees fleeing violence and conflict are unable to travel far beyond the borders of their home country. They often live in refugee camps or urban spaces for years; many children have lived their entire lives in such precarious circumstances. We currently run two programmes in South Yorkshire:

### 1. The Gateway Protection Programme (GPP)

The Gateway Protection Programme is the UK's contribution to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) global resettlement programme. One of the ways in which the UNHCR seeks to assist such refugees is to offer resettlement to another country. Candidates for resettlement to the UK will have been classified by UNHCR field offices as refugees and selected on the basis that they have pressing humanitarian or security needs, are not able to return to their countries of origin and cannot integrate locally. The Home Office then makes the decision on who to accept under the UK programme.

Sheffield was the first city to welcome refugees through the Gateway Protection Programme, with a group of Liberians arriving in 2004. Following that, three groups of Burmese and Karen people were resettled. In 2008-2010 two groups of Iraqis were resettled. Groups of Somali, Congolese, Ethiopian, Bhutanese, Sudanese and Eritrean refugees have arrived in Sheffield between 2010 and 2016. Many have lived in overcrowded refugee camps for nearly two decades before coming to the UK.

### 2. Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme (VPRS)

In September 2015 the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that the UK would resettle 20,000 refugees from Syria by 2020. This means that the UK will be welcoming refugees who have fled Syria and are struggling to survive in the countries neighbouring Syria. According to UNHCR, Turkey currently hosts well over 2.7 million Syrian refugees, while Lebanon, a country the size of Wales, is home to over 1 million.

South Yorkshire is at the forefront of the UK's response to the crisis in Syria by resettling refugees in the region; acknowledging that for some vulnerable people the only solution is to bring them to our region, with a group of Syrian arriving in Sheffield in October 2015. Following that, Syrian families have arrived in Barnsley and Rotherham in 2016.

Despite having endured horrific experiences, most resettled refugees on the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) and the Syrian "Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme" (VPRS) are very keen to contribute to life in the UK, get jobs, learn English, learn new skills and get to know local people.

The Refugee Council plays a leading role in providing specialist support. The Resettlement Teams in South Yorkshire offer an integration support package for twelve months from day one of arriving. This includes help with orientation and longer term issues such as health, accessing education, volunteering & employment, and community development support to involve local people in the programme. A key part of the work is to promote independence – to encourage refugees so that by the end of the twelve months, they are able to get on in life without the initial intensive

support. Refugee Council works in close partnership with local authorities and other key service providers across South Yorkshire to help the resettled refugees work towards this goal.

### Contact us:

You can contact the **Sheffield Resettlement Team** at:

Resettlement Team, Refugee Council, The Exchange Brewery, 2 Bridge Street, Sheffield S3 8NS

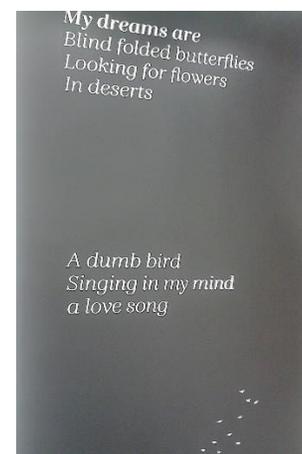
Tel: 0114 399 0800,

Please note The Sheffield Resettlement Team only deliver services for clients who are on the Gateway Protection Programme (GPP) and the Syrian "Vulnerable Person Relocation Scheme" (VPRS) in South Yorkshire.

### Find out more:

You can find out more about [resettlement](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what_we_do/refugee_resettlement) at [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/refugee\\_resettlement](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/what_we_do/refugee_resettlement)

### Frenchgate Poem



By Alfred Thananchayan

#### FORTHCOMING DATES

Until **19 May** 'Journeys' Exhibition at the Peace Museum, Bradford, exploring the themes of migration, refuge and identity. Open Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays 10.00 – 16.00.

**04 May** Local Government Elections

**09 May** 11.30 – 15.00 Second workshop examining the experiences of refugees during the First World War

**09 May** SYMAAG AGM Sheffield 6.30pm

**11 May** Health bus at Meeting House

**12 May** Talk for new arrivals at 10.00, followed by free jumble sale at 11.00 (Meeting House)

**13 May** Stand Up To Racism Sheffield 12.00 – 17.00

**15 May** Nakhba Day

**17 May** First Aid session run by the Red Cross (Meeting House)

**20 May** DCC Outing to Hathersage



*The view from the Keep*

## The operation of Sawa military camp, Eritrea

Compiled by Eritreans in Doncaster

SAWA is a ground hell in this globe but nobody knows about it. It's a place of intensive military training located in the southwest of Eritrea, about 320 kilometres away from the capital city of Asmara, in the Gash-Barka region. Extremely hot escarpments and mountains surround it.

As everyone knows, SAWA is the only gateway to continue to a higher level of education for those who are interested to continue their studies. However, it is also a trap to the youngsters (teenagers) to involve them directly as a soldier and to involve them in the military in the form of indefinite national service. Only 15% pass the exam and continue with education. The rest do military service. In the consequences of who has an ability to get the pass mark to the colleges, for as we know there are no universities in Eritrea and the one where everyone used to study was closed by the dictator government.

Next, it is home for 20,000 soldiers (ie students) every year without plenty of food, water, electricity and sanitation. Not only that, there is not any access of healthy centres in a very well organized manner. On the other side, SAWA has a full resource of depression and ways of making stress, namely, no free movement at

any time to anywhere; no mobile phone to use; no parent visiting; and you should have to look after your area as a watchman every night for at least two hours per person. In short, it is well designed for a military target not for education. Surprisingly there is a symbolic name for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade school – Warsay-Yikallo Sawa Secondary School.

Finally, if you fail to observe the rules and regulations of this military training, there are various Detention Centres nearby. Most of these are underground and zinc mounted cells which makes it hotter. Enda shadushay is the name of the prison.



*At Conisbrough Castle*

## A visit to Conisbrough Castle



By Mohaid Abdalla

I am very happy to see the castle and interested to learn of UK history through visits like this place. It was a wonderful building- very old, and even now it is good and strong. It is an opportunity for people and children to know about what happened years ago and to make a different point to see how people thought and lived. I hope we shall see again.

By Biniam Amanuel

It was a fantastic occasion on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2017 at Conisbrough Castle. It is located to the south and 8km from Doncaster. The trip was organised by members of the Quaker Meeting House. Everything fulfilled, including transportation, refreshment – variety of sandwiches for the whole day.

Then, from Doncaster, after we had gone half an hour, we arrived at Conisbrough Castle. Firstly, we met people who work at the Castle, who are kind and very friendly, and the little shop near the Castle which is within the compound played a huge role to give a clear picture and information about the background of the ancient heritage to the visitors. Beside that there are a lot of precious and preserved things of Conisbrough Castle which the ancient people and fighters used. In addition to that, there are many histories of many particular events written everywhere on the sides of the wall of that small

shop. We have also seen things which were used by the people of that time for example the old coins, swords, pots, knives etc. All these things made me surprised about the old but modern civilisation of Conisbrough Castle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.

The Castle is absolutely incredible and it was built at the top of the hill. It has three floors, three toilets and many narrow windows, with well-designed winding stairs that give access to climb up to the top of the roof. However, at the time of emergency ie when the Castle was surrounded by enemies, it was not easy to get water from the river so they built a water well underneath the Castle – that is amazing! Not only this, the narrow windows are also designed to trap the arrows that came from the enemies. One of the guides on the trip told us many stories, this is one from them. “The fighters used arrows and bows to protect themselves from their enemies”. Everyone on the visit appreciated the techniques they used at those early ages.

Finally, we all enjoyed the trip and everyone would like to say thank you for giving us this great opportunity to the organisers of this unforgettable trip.



### What people enjoyed about the visit

First of all I do thank all volunteers in DCC and whole staffs in castle as well. The most interesting things I have seen in castle the way they are thinking to defend the enemy and the way they are building the castle. It really positive thing about building to defeat the enemy very more professional.



There was lots of benefits of this journey. It was nice and sunny day and we discover the historical building of Conisbrough for first time like never before. I think it is good organised from DCC staff.

I have got to know a history of castle old fort. I have learn about how people in that age used to protect this castle. I like the way they maintain history in England including their equipment to keep memorised. I enjoyed to have a lunch in castle old fort.

We enjoy today's trip. Because we know a lot about England's history. We know why the ancient people built a castle. Today's trip also helpful for us because as asylum seekers we have a lot of depression. It help us to relax and meeting new friends. Finally than you so much for preparing this trip.

I would be grateful to be a part of this memorable trip to visit the English castle at Conisbrough. I never seen such ancient palace. Thank you for given.

I enjoyed burying the dolls. I didn't like seeing the ladybirds (aged 7y).

## We went to Astrabound



16 adults and 14 children aged from 14 months to 8 years spent an afternoon at Astrabound.

These are some comments from those who participated.

We enjoyed today. My son played with other children and really liked it. We meet our friends and had a good chat. We like it very much.

It's good. The ball pool. My daughter is so busy she forget me. She so happy.

Today I liked the play area because I like the small slide. I did not like the big slide because it was too scary.

I enjoyed playing basketball. I enjoyed sliding on the red slide. I loved playing football.



## From Damascus to London via Doncaster

Imad Alarnab was a restaurateur in Damascus, Syria, where he once owned two restaurants and several juice bars before being forced to flee the country in July 2015. He has now opened a pop-up restaurant in east London to raise money for refugees.

When he first arrived in the UK, Imad came to Doncaster where his sister and her family still live. The journey to the UK was itself traumatic: a 64-day journey through 10 countries, including nine hours in the back of an estate car boot with seven other refugees.

Now, with the help of Unicef's NEXT Generation London and pop-up start-up Appear Here, he has been given the chance to cook again in Imad's Syrian Kitchen – a pop-up on Columbia Road, EC2.

Everything on Imad's menu are dishes his mother cooked in Syria.

These include fattoush (a salad with toasted flatbreads, pomegranate molasses, tomato and cucumber), kabsa (spicy chicken with cardamom and rice), kebab hindi (meatball stew) plus many established favourites including tabbouleh, hummus, falafel and baklava.

Imad told CNN: "(In Syria) we think it's a blessing to have food on our tables, so we have to save (it)."

While food itself is a blessing for Syrians, he says it is also used by many in his country to offer their

friendship and generosity. Food brings strangers together.

"Syrians ... are some of the most generous people ever," he says.

"I visited most of the villages all over Syria and once I visited North Aleppo and we were asking (for) directions and instead of telling us where to go they asked us to come inside, eat their food and then one of them led us the way, without even knowing who we were."

Showcasing Syrian generosity is one of his main goals in London.



After finishing the meal at his pop-up restaurant, many customers approached Imad to thank him.

"These thank yous are better than any payment I could ever receive," he says.

In the future, Imad says he wants to offer free meals to anyone who doesn't have the money to eat out at a more permanent base.

"I know not everyone has the money to spend on my meals, I want to make it available to everyone."

## THEME: FIRST WORLD WAR REFUGEES IN DONCASTER

DONCASTER QUAKER MEETING  
HOUSE, DN1 3RH

TUESDAY 9TH MAY 2017

11:30-12:30: Lunch. We will have a buffet lunch on offer. Please bring along some food to share with the rest of the group, particularly food that is traditional to you.

12:30-13:00: Find out about the lives of several Belgian refugees who came to Doncaster 100 years ago. Find out about who they were, where they worked and their lives in Doncaster.

13:00-15:00: Interactive activities about life in Yorkshire 100 years ago. Including:

- Create some artwork for display in Doncaster Museum.
- Dress up in historical costumes
- Record your experiences of life in Doncaster today
- Handle real First World War objects
- Meet staff from Sheffield Industrial Museums who will be bringing photographs about refugees in Sheffield 100 years ago

## Brief News Headlines

### 1. Nevsun AGM 3 May

On May 3, Nevsun – the mining company that operates in Eritrea will hold their Annual General Meeting in Vancouver.

A petition will be presented which draws attention to thousands of Eritreans who are conscripted into military service indefinitely and used as a cheap labour source by the government, and often subject to untold suffering. Yet since 2008, Nevsun Resources – a Canadian-owned company – set up operations

in Eritrea mining copper, zinc and gold and employed a state-owned company that uses forced conscript labor, to construct its Bisha mine. In the face of denials of responsibility, former workers have lodged cases against Nevsun in Canadian courts.

### 2. Ethiopia

Consecutive, below-average rainy season yields for the Gu (from March to May) and Deyr (October to December) seasons have caused severe drought across northern, eastern, and central Ethiopia. This is leading to high levels of food insecurity, particularly in Afar, in Sitti zone of Somali region, and parts of Amhara, Oromia, and SNNPR. Malnutrition has increased significantly. Below-average rainfall is projected for the Belg season, which will affect the drought in the southern and south-eastern parts of the country.

Hosting approximately 811,500 refugees from neighbouring countries, including over 349,000 from South Sudan, the majority of Ethiopia's refugee camps have reached full capacity. Overcrowding, malnutrition, and critical shortfalls in humanitarian aid are of concern. Most refugees have been in protracted displacement, but remain in need of assistance.

### 3. UNHCR Report on Desperate Journeys

It concludes that movement has continued but taken more diversified and dangerous journeys after increased border restrictions were introduced in 2016 aimed at restricting refugee and migrant movements towards and inside Europe.

Due to the closure of the Western Balkan route and the EU/Turkey Agreement, since April 2016 smaller numbers of people have continued to leave Turkey along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Most cross by sea to Greece, but some also cross land borders to Greece and Bulgaria, or travel by sea to Cyprus.

82% of those who have arrived in Serbia are from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and almost half are children (20% of those unaccompanied). The report notes that "as a result of stronger border restrictions many rely on smugglers, taking high risks which resulted in several deaths in 2016".

The Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy has since become the primary entry point to Europe. However, arrival trends in Italy show that the primary nationalities who crossed to Greece had not switched in significant numbers to the Central Mediterranean route.

The report notes that 181,436 people arrived in Italy by sea during 2016. Ninety per cent had travelled by boat from Libya.

The report also notes that during the final months of 2016, there was a shift in the pattern of migration with more people reaching Europe "through the Western Mediterranean route, either by crossing the sea to Spain from Morocco and Algeria, or by entering the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta".

The nine page report also recognises that "tens of thousands of people have been reportedly pushed back by border authorities in Europe, including in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Spain, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with many cases of alleged violence and abuses in an apparent attempt to deter further entry attempts".

The report is available at <http://www.unhcr.org/58b449f54.pdf>

### 4. Turkey-Syria border wall

On April 11, the Turkish Ministry of National Defence announced the completion of the first phase of the 911 km wall sealing off the Syrian border. While the construction of the wall has been described as a security measure, it adds a further obstacle for Syrian refugees reportedly targeted by Turkish border guards.

## Continuing human rights concerns in Sri Lanka

by Alfred Thananchayan and Vijith Vicknaraja

I would like to shed some more light regarding the human rights violations that took place during the final few years of the civil war in Sri Lanka, my country of birth.

These are some of the significant events that have taken place during and since the end of the civil war.

1. On 8<sup>th</sup> January 2009, Lasantha Manual Wickrematunge, chief editor of 'Sunday Leader' newspaper, human rights activist and media personality was murdered in cold blood in Colombo for exercising his right for freedom of speech and criticizing the then Sri Lankan Government's response to the reports of human rights violations during the war. Whilst the current government is conducting Mr Wickrematunge's case at present, it seems they are reluctant to find the culprits behind the murder.

2. Mr Raviraj, Tamil MP for Chavacherry was shot dead in 2008. Even though the present government initiated Mr Raviraj's trial, the Sinhalese majority jury unanimously found the accused not guilty of the murder charges and they were subsequently released. Mr Raviraj's wife was not satisfied with this result and has appealed to the High Court for a re-trial.

3. Mr Manoganesan, MP for Colombo Central, recently announced that 551 young Tamil youths were abducted in white vans during the period of Mahinda Rajapakse's government where Gothaabaye Rajapakse was Defence Minister.

4. In 2015 the UNHRC's resolution 30.1 called for the inclusion of foreign or commonwealth judges in a judicial mechanism to hear the human rights violations and war crimes that occurred during the civil war. The Sri Lankan government was given a two year timeframe in which to carry out this resolution but they failed to achieve this. This year, the 34<sup>th</sup> session of the UNHRC passed another resolution extending the time period by a further two years to implement the resolution fully. This resolution expressed the importance for an independent judiciary and the inclusion of foreign judges and commonwealth judges in this process.

5. However, the President of Sri Lanka, Maithirapala Sirisena, has announced to the Sri Lankan public that he will not accept the inclusion of foreign judges and lawyers in the tribunal.

6. The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremasinghe, has echoed similar sentiments and has said he will not accept foreign judges in the tribunal.

7. The majority of the opposition party members are also adamant that foreign judges and lawyers should not be included in the tribunal.

8. Based on the previous few points, I am sure you can see that the next two years will also end in the same manner with no fair trial taking place.

9. The Channel Four documentaries 'Killing Fields' in 2011 and 'No Fire Zone' in 2013 demonstrated the gross war crimes that took place during the civil war, which were corroborated by America, UK and the UNO experts.

10. In the early 2000s, six Tamil boys were arrested by the security forces of Sri Lanka and were all murdered on the spot without questioning due to unwarranted suspicion. Their bodies were found at sea and it is an outrage that to this day no investigation has been carried out.

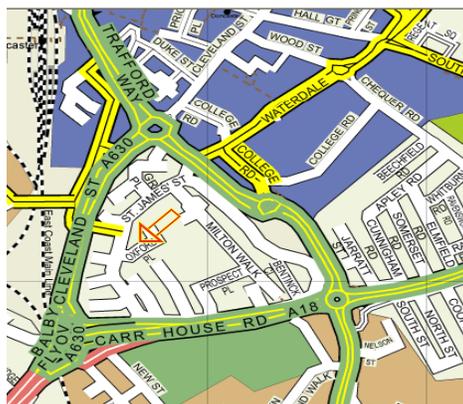
11. In a village called Muttur in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka, 16 NGO (ACF or Action Against Hunger) workers were stranded in the HGO camp and brutally killed. There has been no information or investigation carried out thus far into what happened.

International tribunals such as the Nuremburg trials or the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia would not have taken place without international pressure. International bodies such as the UN and its members are important for ensuring that any human rights violations that take place during conflicts are exposed and the person(s) and in many cases governments responsible are held accountable.

I wish to give a voice and bring justice to the victims and victims' families of the Sri Lankan civil war because when injustice becomes law, resistance becomes a duty.

# A view from the edge Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

Based at the  
Quaker Meeting House  
Off St James St  
Doncaster DN1 3RH



To receive a copy of this newsletter by email, send a message to [Paulfitzp@aol.com](mailto:Paulfitzp@aol.com)

Please send your contributions and suggestions to the same address.

**Doncaster Conversation Club** is one of many Conversation Clubs across the country which offer opportunities for local people and people who have come to live in the UK to join together to share friendship, while offering support and practical help.

**The Club** seeks to create a relaxed, friendly and supportive environment, and works on the principles of

**Ownership** – everyone can get involved

**Impartiality** – it is not affiliated to any political or religious body

**Confidentiality** – what you say is private

**Respect** – for each other's differences and individuality.

**The Club** is pleased to acknowledge the support of **Doncaster Society of Friends (Quakers), The Red Cross, The Refugee Council, Migrant Help, The Foyle Foundation, DIAL Doncaster, The Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group, St Leger Homes, Club Doncaster Foundation, M25, Riverside Housing, DARTS, CAST, Fareshare, The Ruth Hayman Trust and Doncaster Minster.**



WharfedaleFoundation



The Doncaster Conversation Club is run entirely by volunteers with the support of occasional grants for specific activities, currently from the Foyle Foundation, the Allen Lane Foundation, and the Wharfedale Trust

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors.

**Paul FitzPatrick**

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Doncaster

South Yorkshire

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