



STANDING ALONGSIDE REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DONCASTER

# A view from the edge

## Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

02 August 2018

IN THIS ISSUE

## Have you heard the one about...?

By Paul FitzPatrick

To stand alongside asylum seekers, as DCC aspires to do, requires engagement with such a wide range of issues. Various aspects of government policy touch upon matters of daily concern like access to health, housing and homelessness, benefits, learning English or gaining other educational qualifications. Then there is coping with the labyrinthine ways of the asylum process and the gallows humour of celebrating three years of waiting for a decision, or, as in the title of one recent report, 'destitution, discrimination and distrust'. And then there is country information to absorb or specific reports, as on torture.

A fairly random selection of items from various reports show that since 2005 56% of legal aid providers have been lost and there are now 26 local

authorities with more than 100 section 95 supported people and no local legal aid provision. One year on from Refugee Action's 'Slipping through the Cracks' Report, people are still waiting too long for the asylum support they're entitled to. New research shows destitute families at risk of homelessness are waiting 3 times longer than they should. At the European level, the prevention of onward migration, expansion of FRONTEX and clampdown on NGOs operating in the Mediterranean, all indicate a shift from human rights to realpolitik. Deaths on the Mediterranean are on the increase again.

The sheer number of reports 'about' asylum seekers sometimes seems a sign of a moral panic. Their recent proliferation tells us much about the kind of society we are creating in

Britain today. Compared to 2015, the liberal reaction seems muted.



Bicycle servicing



Mehfil at CAST

## But why do people come here?

By Julia Burne

I often talk to people in the Health Service or elsewhere about the Conversation Club. Most people are interested and sometimes sympathetic to asylum seekers, but a recurring question is 'Why'? There is often an underlying assumption that people come here to escape poverty at home – this being reinforced by government officials giving interviews and talking of asylum seekers in this way. In my experience at DCC I have not found anyone who has come just to escape poverty. It is true, I am not in a position to know everyone's background – and those who make it through the Home Office system to Doncaster may be a select group. However, when I am privileged to learn more, I have always found an account of a strong push to leave home – not just a pull to reach a 'wealthier country'. This makes sense. Leaving home and family behind for good is very painful – and the recurring theme is that people make the decision to leave when they are in fear in their home country. The fear may be for many reasons.

Perhaps this is illustrated by the following account of a young man from Sudan. He was 'internally displaced' from his home in Darfur and was living in a refugee camp. So the superficial assumption would be that he would be safe to remain there – why would he come to the UK?

*(I have changed his name to Mohamed for confidentiality – although have his permission to otherwise use his information).*

*Mohamed's family were farmers and lived in a village in Darfur. His father also had a machine for grinding seeds into flour for making bread. The Janjaweed militia arrived in his village in 2005 when he was 10 years old. He, his parents and seven siblings fled to a refugee camp near the city of Manwash. The refugee camp was like a town in itself – with NGOs in charge including Save the Children, UN World Division, UNESCO, CARE, UNICEF and UNAMI.*

*Mohamed learnt English in the classes run by the NGOs – something which he has been grateful for since then. Mohamed was the second eldest son in the family. His family went back to the village to collect the grinding machine – and were able to continue to use it in the refugee camp. They were allowed petroleum to run the machine. People would bring bags of seed and leave with bags of flour.*

*However, the government became concerned that they ground seeds for everyone – including members of the opposition. They accused the family of supporting the opposition. They said that when people came to grind seed, they were also able to discuss politics and were given anti – government propaganda. They accused Mohamed's family of hiding guns or petroleum for the opposition in the sacks of flour people took away. In 2008, Mohamed's older brother was taken away by the government because of these accusations – although 2 years later he escaped to South Sudan.*

*In 2015 the government returned and burnt the family's milling machine. Mohamed was working with his uncle on the day the government came. His uncle was shot when he tried to run away – and Mohamed learnt that he died 3 days later from his wounds. Mohamed didn't run – but was captured and imprisoned. He still feels very sad when he thinks of his uncle – who was only slightly older than he was - and his best friend.*

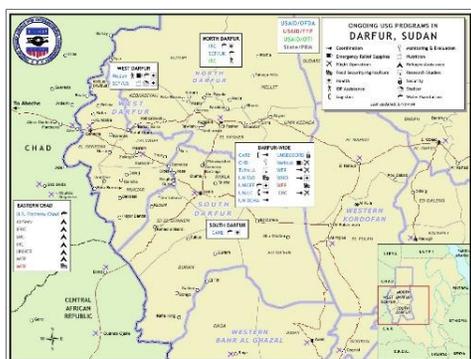
*Mohamed was in prison for 45 days. Prison in Sudan is brutal – he was beaten and tortured on a daily basis. He does not know why he was allowed to leave prison – but could only do so by signing a form to say he would report at the local police station every week. His family were very happy to see him – they had thought he was dead. Three days after his release his family arranged for him to go to Libya. A man taking a truckload of sheep across the desert took Mohamed and another man for free because of their farming background – and he needed help in caring for the sheep he was taking. (Sheep from Sudan are welcome in Libya for Ramadan as they eat better grass and have better meat than those raised in Libya).*

*Libya was a very bad place. He was in prison there for nearly 2 years. A man helped him escape from prison – but only on the understanding that he would work for him for free for 6 months after his release. He then had to work another month to 'pay for the fees for your release'. He then worked on a building site to earn money for the boat to Italy.*

*There were 150 people on the boat, which left Libya at 4 am. The boat was unsafe – but they were picked up by a Red Cross boat after 2 days and taken to Italy. He was forced to give his fingerprints in Italy – and again in France. This makes him liable to deportation to one of these countries. It would be unfortunate were he to be deported as he has picked up a couple of serious infections at some time in his life – and treatment for these conditions should not be interrupted.*

So – what would you have done in Mohamed’s place?

### A note on Darfur



Darfur is a region in the west of Sudan – home to both Arab and black African Sudanese. The black African people, who are mainly settled farmers, have been discriminated against for a long time. In 2003 rebel groups launched attacks against the government. The government responded by enlisting nomadic Arabic tribes to attack the black population – promising land in return. The Arabic tribes – known as the Janjaweed (devil on horseback in Arabic) - destroyed and burnt villages, killed civilians, raped, kidnapped and tortured.

By the end of 2004, it was estimated that 100,000 people had been killed. 2 million people were displaced. Many people fled to refugee camps – some of these in Chad – Sudan’s neighbour to the west. In 2011, South Sudan gained independence – but this did not include the region of Darfur where violence continues with government backed forces continuing to attack the civilian population.

After the Battle of Omdurman in 1898, the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium recognised Ali Dinar as sultan of Darfur, in return for an annual tribute of 500 British pounds. During the First World War, however, the British, suspecting the influence of the Ottoman Empire in Darfur, invaded, and incorporated Darfur into Sudan in 1916. In the years that followed, including after independence in 1956, resources were devoted systematically to Khartoum and Blue Nile province, rather than to Darfur.



## Friday football

Football continues regularly on Friday afternoons at 4pm, courtesy of Doncaster Club Foundation. Participation is vigorous and enthusiastic - and skilful.



### FORTHCOMING DATES

**11 August** BBQ and canoeing at Barnby Dun

**13 August** DCC Visit to Lifewise. Bus departs from the Meeting House 9.45.

**27 August** Eid in the Park

**02 September** ‘Share the journey’: a walk around Elmfield Park, starting at 2pm. Part of a global campaign for the rights of people on the move. The aim is to walk, collectively, 24,900 miles, the distance around the whole world, as an act of solidarity with global neighbours forced to flee their homes.

**05 September** Literacy Project at the Minster restarts 1.00pm

## The Greater Lincolnshire Area of Sanctuary

By Heather Luna

[Sanctuary Breaks Co-ordinator]



Greater Lincolnshire  
Area of Sanctuary

In March 2016, at a vigil beside St James's Church, Louth, 200 people pledged their support for Syrian refugees. We asked Lincolnshire Council to take a share of the people displaced by civil war. This didn't work, but Vigil 200 inspired many in our local community to offer a helping hand to refugees and asylum seekers.

One group of local people formed the East Lindsey Area of Sanctuary. We were joined by people who, with generosity and warmth, wanted to offer their homes to refugees and asylum seekers living in the 'dispersal' cities. Many asylum seekers have travelled through incredible hardship to reach safety, and housing is generally basic and shared, with a support allowance of £5 a day for clothing and food. So, by offering a sanctuary break, for a weekend or more, in the country, or by the sea, we provide a respite, the chance to rest, recover, enjoy time with their family, learn English, make new friends, and find out about our country. It works the other way, too: we learn so much from our guests.

In the past eighteen months, we have welcomed twenty-nine

individuals and families with children, to our county. Our team of befrienders work with the hosts to provide transport, activities for children and families, and teach English. Our fundraisers are always busy organising events to raise money so that we can pay our guests' bus fares and provide activities. We received a small grant from Louth Town Council to work with sixth form students and they went on to arrange an exchange visit with young asylum seekers, which was a great success. Another grant means we can organise a language retreat next year, teaching English.

Recently, we received a grant from the Bishop of Lincoln's Social Justice Fund, which meant we could appoint a part time coordinator, whose role is to recruit and support more hosts and befrienders, to provide more sanctuary breaks. We work with a network of City of Sanctuary projects who refer guests to us. We have extended our work into North and North East Lincolnshire and have changed our name to reflect how much the project has grown in those short months.

We are now actively working to provide befriending days and opportunities for the 23 unaccompanied asylum seeking minors and 42 Syrian refugees (eight families) living in Scunthorpe.

If you would like to be involved, to promote and support the inclusion and welfare of refugees and asylum seekers, there are a number of ways: we always need more hosts and befrienders, and we are actively seeking people interested in fundraising and supporting other behind-the-scenes work.

In the words of the Pope after his visit to Lampedusa: "...our shared response may be articulated by four verbs: to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate".

Find us on Facebook (Greater Lincolnshire Area of Sanctuary) or email [heather@greaterlincolnshire.cityofsanctuary.org](mailto:heather@greaterlincolnshire.cityofsanctuary.org) or ring 07507962784 for more information.

### Mehfil at CAST

'Mehfil' is the name for an Indian gathering of entertainment. CAST hosted this open mic event on 24 July, featuring guest poets and local artists sharing poetry, prose and songs. Denise, Alfred and Mazen each shared some of their own work.



*Alfred reading his poetry*

Afterwards, there were script readings of short plays based on a theme from 'Othello'. Alfred again contributed.

## Learning English at the Minster



### 1. Literacy Project

The Literacy Project is taking a break during August. It will restart on Wednesday 5th September.

Every Wednesday 1.00 - 2.30 in the Minster, and in St George's House adjacent.

### 2. Summer Project

During August there will be an ESOL and History class at Doncaster Minster each Wednesday afternoon, 1.00- 2.30pm in the church

This is a FREE class for any asylum seeker, refugee or other adult wanting to improve their English. The class is for adults or young people in their teens, come and join us!

Dates: Wednesday 8th August, Wednesday 15th August, Wednesday 22nd August, Wednesday 29th August.

The class will be led by teachers from Doncaster Family and Community Learning and from the Museums service.

### 3. IELTS Taster course

For six weeks during June-July, we experimented in offering a course to introduce those interested to the requirements of an IELTS qualification. This is a widely recognised qualification which is demanded by universities for students who do not have English as their first language. It expects a high level of competence in Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing.

On Monday evenings from 6.00 – 8.00, students undertook exercises in each of the four skill areas. We all agreed, teachers and students alike, that the demands of this course are great and that we all learned a lot.

There are now refugees in Doncaster who would like to achieve this qualification, but funding, either for a course or for exam entry, remains a great barrier.

*The photograph on Page 1 is of participants in the course.*

## Brief news headlines

### 1. Syria

According to the latest data from the Airwars monitoring group, over 1,424 days of air strikes, 107,814 bombs and missiles have been used against 29,741 targets in Iraq and Syria by the US-led forces. Pentagon sources speak of at least 60,000 IS paramilitaries killed but Airwars also reported 6,321 civilians killed.

The figures do not include the impact of hundreds of Russian air strikes in Syria and information from the heavily bombed cities of Raqqa, and Mosul in Iraq, suggests that many thousands of bodies of civilians are still buried under the rubble.

### 2. The stateless boy who survived the Thai cave rescue

14-year-old Adul Sam-on was the only English speaker among the team of footballers trapped in the Thai cave. He also speaks Chinese, Burmese and Thai. He greeted the British divers who found them, and acted as interpreter throughout the rescue.

Adul is stateless. According to reports, he was born in Wa state, an unrecognised state within Myanmar which is unable to issue legal identity documentation. At age six, Adul's parents "slipped" him into Thailand to protect him from conflict, and offer him education and opportunities which he couldn't get in his home state

While official figures put the number of stateless people in Thailand at 400,000, the reality is estimated to be more than three million. Statelessness occurs when an individual is either denied citizenship or unable to access citizenship they have a right to.

Source: Derina Johnson in *The Conversation* 15 July 2018

### 3. Flash flooding in Sudan

Many people have been displaced in Kassala.



And in the region of El Obeid, hundreds of houses have been destroyed, bridges and roads washed away. People from Khartoum are not able to travel to El Fashir, Nyala and El Genina by road due to the destruction of the bridges or roads.



Part of the problem comes from the effect climate change is having on Sudan. Although people have always built houses of mud which have withstood the rains as they have never been too severe, they are now finding the rains much heavier than in the past due to climate change, and the mud houses are no longer able to withstand the new torrential downpours. People who can afford it are now building in concrete bricks rather than mud, but for the poor, this is out of their economic reach.

Source: Sudan Link

## Developments in Eritrea

Eritrea Focus, an association of NGOs, human rights organisations, exile and refugee groups and individuals concerned with the gross abuses of human rights in Eritrea, has published a report on *Mining and Repression in Eritrea: Corporate Complicity in Human Rights Abuses* to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Eritrea. It draws attention to the horrific abuses and suffering of Eritreans, both within the country and as refugees living abroad.

This report provides a unique insight into the operations of Eritrea's little-studied mining sector and explains the critical role mining plays in financing what is one of the most repressive regimes in the world.

The mineral sector is rapidly expanding. Crushing low wages and enforced labour have contributed to its growth. The authors draw on first-

hand accounts from former miners who were forced to work on the mines, to highlight these trends:

**Firstly**, the scale of the operations, which currently involve 17 mining companies from across the globe. Chinese, Canadian, Indian and Australian companies are involved, but key roles are played by UK mining and financial firms. British companies and the City of London are integral to these operations.

**Secondly**, mining in Eritrea raises important issues for the UK Parliament, particularly in relation to allegations of the use of National Service conscripts in the mining sector. These enforced labourers are, as a UN Commission of Inquiry found, effectively slave labourers. Slavery is illegal under British law, and new provisions in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 put companies under a clear duty to take responsibility wherever it occurs within their supply chains. They must scrutinise and report on their operations and subsidiaries beyond their second, third and fourth tiers with a view to eradicating slavery from their supply chains.

**Thirdly**, the report highlights the potentially illicit purposes to which mining revenues can be put by the Eritrean government, which has been under UN Sanctions since 2013. The direct or indirect supply of weapons to Eritrea is forbidden, as is direct and indirect assistance to its military. At the same time experts reporting to the UN Security Council have explained the opaque nature of Eritrean government finances. As their report stated: "Essentially, Eritrea manages two parallel economies: a formal economic

sphere ostensibly managed by the State, and an opaque, largely offshore financial system controlled by elements of the ruling party and their supporters."

Mining companies exploring and operating in Eritrea have contributed significant revenue to the government through taxation, dividends, and other payments. Of these, a number – including Nevsun Resources Ltd, Danakali Ltd, and Andiamo Resources Ltd – are backed by UK finance houses and investment firms, as detailed in their publicly available financial statements and set out in this report.

More positively, there appears to have been some rapprochement between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The Ethiopian president and the Eritrean prime minister signed a declaration ending 20 years of hostility and restoring diplomatic relations and normal ties between the countries. The two countries are now formally at peace. Airlines will connect their capitals once more, Ethiopia will use Eritrea's ports again – its natural outlet to the sea – and diplomatic relations will be resumed.

Perhaps most important of all, according to Martin Plaut, the border will be demarcated. Populations who thought themselves citizens of one country could find themselves in another. This could provoke strong reactions, unless both sides show flexibility. For Eritrea there are real benefits - not only the revenues from Ethiopian trade through its ports, but also the potential of very substantial potash developments on the Ethiopia-Eritrea border that could be very lucrative.

## Cameroon – Part 2 Bringing the story up to date

By Vincent Arah

From 1972 onward, the plan to 'Francophonise' the country was set in full motion. In 1984 the current President Paul Biya again changed the name by decree from United Republic of Cameroon to République du Cameroon (Republic of Cameroon), which was the name adopted by French speaking Cameroon in 1960 when they obtained independence. In 2014 the Minister of justice signed a ministerial decree making French the only language to be spoken in courts in Cameroon including in the English speaking part of the country. The Minister of education in turn decided to post French speaking teachers to the English part of the country to teach the English speaking Cameroonians in French. All English speaking Cameroonians are expected to speak French in order to join the public service, the police, the army etc. but French speaking Cameroonians are not required to speak English.

### October 2016 Onward

In May 2015 English speaking lawyers wrote to the Head of State and the Minister of Justice asking government to allow only those educated in common law and versed in the English language to be allowed in courts in the English jurisdiction of Cameroon. Receiving no response from government, lawyers from the English speaking part of the country took to the streets in October 2016

in a peaceful demonstration, and like always government responded by sending police who brutalised, tortured and arrested the lawyers. The lawyers were joined by teachers in November 2016 asking government to allow only English speaking teachers in English speaking schools. Again government forces responded by violence. The lawyers and teachers were later joined by the civil society organisations who did not only call for reforms in judicial and educational sectors, but called for a return to the Federal system of government as was the case in 1961. To government, a call for the return to a Federal system of government was the red line and the government responded by sending soldiers and police officers who brutalised, raped and killed peaceful and unarmed demonstrators, internet was suspended in the English speaking part of Cameroon for 93 days, leaders of the demonstrators were arrested and taken to jails in the French speaking parts of Cameroon, entire villages in English speaking Cameroon were burnt down and the recent discovery of mass grave bears witness to the carnage that is being committed in English speaking Cameroon. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees and Human Rights Watch have documented that there are about 37.000 refugees from English Speaking Cameroon currently living in neighbouring Nigeria with about 100.000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Since many people are killed by the military and buried in mass graves, it is difficult at this point to give an appropriate number of deaths. National human rights and civil society organisations have published over 1000 deaths.

Government's brutality against English Cameroonians has radicalised many of them and the latter are now seeking outright secession from French speaking Cameroon with independence of the British Southern Cameroons their sole objective.

The English speaking Cameroonians are disappointed that the International community is doing nothing to stop the genocide in Cameroon. The British government has abandoned the English speaking Cameroonians to France who are behind all the political machination as they would like English speaking Cameroon to be assimilated and become part of the French Central African Empire. At this point there is very little anyone can do to stop the English speaking Cameroonians from claiming their right to self-determinations. After Rwanda the world said 'never again', yet the world is failing again like it did in Rwanda. As the developed world continues to move towards nationalism and anti-immigrant policy, immigration from Africa has become an election winning subject. Citizens of Europe and other developed countries view immigrants and asylum seekers as some resource draining commodities, failing to recognise the responsibility of the governments in the tragedy of Africa. Countries like France have deliberately created conflict in Africa in order to exploit resources.

WHAT A SHAME.

# A view from the edge Doncaster Conversation Club Newsletter

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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** offers opportunities for local people and people who have sought asylum 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, South Yorkshire Community Foundation, The Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group, St Leger Homes, Club Doncaster Foundation, M25, Riverside Housing, DARTS, CAST, Fareshare, The Ruth Hayman Trust and Doncaster Minster.**

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

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