



Paula Barker MP

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House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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His Excellency Filippo Grandi
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
10 Furnival St
London
EC4A 1AB

Date: 30th April 2021

Dear Filippo,

Re; UK Government's consultation on "New Plan for Immigration"

I am writing with the support of colleagues from across the House to make you aware of our dismay at the proposals set out in the Government's "New Plan for Immigration" and at what the impact of these proposals will be on asylum seekers and refugees if they become law. The Government are running a consultation on the proposals which closes on 6th May 2021.

As well as the concerns which Parliamentarians hold about the proposals, we have heard from refugee and human rights organisations including the Refugee Council, the British Red Cross and Amnesty who have widely condemned the proposals. We have also heard from several of our own constituents expressing their own disgust at the Government's proposals.

The proposals are hugely concerning in many respects, but we would draw your attention specifically to the following central tenet of the plans.

The plans would see asylum seekers who arrive to the UK via what the Government term as "illegal" routes treated less favourably than those arriving through "safe and legal routes" such as resettlement programmes. The Government have not set out any additional "safe and legal" routes which will be available in the future should the plans be adopted.

For anybody arriving to the UK via what the Government term as a "safe third country", firstly, they will have their claims tested for inadmissibility and potential removal to the third country. Then, where no agreement is reached on such a removal, they will only be granted temporary leave of up to 30 months (with no guarantee of access to public funds and limited family reunion rights) in the event of a successful claim.

We agree with the Refugee Council when they make the following observation on this part of the Government's proposals:

"This central proposal could completely undermine the principle of asylum protection in the UK and runs counter to one of the basic tenets of the 1951 Refugee Convention – that someone's mode of arrival should have no influence on whether they have a right to make an asylum claim, or whether they are recognised as a refugee.

The Refugee Convention protects refugees from being punished for having to enter a country without prior permission e.g. through clandestine means or using false documents. It also confirms that

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states with refugees in their territory should provide 'the same treatment with respect to public relief and assistance as is accorded to their nationals.'

As Parliamentarians, we are proud that the UK were a founding signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and are therefore concerned that these plans could find the UK in breach of the Convention and its related protocols. The Government insist that their plans are consistent with their obligations as a signatory to the Convention.

We would appreciate your comment on whether the plans as set out would be compliant with the UK's obligations under the Convention, should they become adopted policy.

We believe that the Government's plans represent a signal to those fleeing war and persecution and to the international community that the UK is attempting to take advantage of its status as an island nation to retreat from its moral obligations and its international commitments, whilst countries who already accept many more refugees than the UK will be expected to fill the gap. The proposals do nothing to address the problems which asylum seekers and refugees currently face in the UK including with respect to delays processing their claims, access to justice and community integration – in fact they will likely compound these problems.

We would welcome your views on these concerns and Government's plans more generally, in order to inform our work in Parliament holding the Government to account. As stated above, the Government's consultation on the plans closes on 6th May 2021 and after that, the 'Sovereign Borders Bill' is expected to be announced in the Queen's Speech on 11th May 2021.

Thank you in advance and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Paula Barker MP

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Debbie Abrahams MP
Tahir Ali MP
Hannah Bardell MP
Apsana Begum MP
Baroness Christine Blower
Baroness Pauline Bryan
Richard Burgon MP

Ian Byrne MP
Dan Carden MP
Baroness Shami Chakrabarti
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