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# Their Voices will be heard

On Saturday 22nd June up to 5,000 people marched through London. They carried placards saying 'Stop the War on Asylum Seekers', 'Stop Attacks on Asylum Seekers' and 'Refugees are Welcome Here'. Although the media and government have over the last few years turned asylum seekers into hate figures and made them susceptible to verbal and physical abuse, they are not alone in their vulnerability.

There are many others beyond just those seeking asylum that are being attacked by the government.

On the march and facing deportation were people who came to the UK for family reunification and or work. These migrants come to the UK to work, to do the jobs we won't, for wages we find

unacceptable. Some of these migrants are overstayers who entered on temporary visas, but who have made a life here and want to remain, others entered without documentation, prepared to risk death or injury in order to earn a living for themselves and their families. Some were students who have put down roots and want to remain here to work but who now find themselves liable for removal.

Then there are those who came to share their lives with British citizens or residents, but whose marriages or relationships the government disputes. Among the most at risk are women who came to the UK legally as spouses and have been abandoned by their UK husbands, women who have left their marriage to UK nationals

because of violence, children who came to the UK to join their parents, and parents who came to join their children and were refused leave to remain.

Many of these people have left their country, not because they were direct targets of political, religious or racial persecution, but for a mixture of social, economic and political reasons. But whatever their reasons for leaving their countries of origin, they are in Britain now and have become, members of our communities. Their lives and ours will be better for their presence in this country. There is no reason for them to leave, and every reason for the British government to stop hounding them. NCADC numbers among its campaigns many others facing deportation, some of whom,

like asylum seekers, are detained in prisons and removal centres around the country.

The detention and deportation of people who have committed no crime, but simply because they have not been granted permission by the state to remain here amounts to cruel and inhumane treatment, as does forcing people who are British citizens or residents to either leave Britain or live without their loved ones, such hatred may be turned against only some members of our society, but it damages all of us.

That is why it is important to fight against the detention and deportation of everyone - whether asylum seeker, overstayer or undocumented migrant.

[For more info: [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk)]



## Mass Escape from Woomera Detention Centre

Thirty-four asylum seekers escaped from the Woomera Detention Centre in the South Australian desert on the night of June 26. Five have so far been recaptured and four people have also been arrested for aiding the escape and are in custody in Port Augusta. Three people alleged to have "aided and abetted" the escape have since been released on bail from Port Augusta police station

According to a report, the break-out happened around midnight, when refugee supporters with vans drove up to the centre, and broke through the fence. Police have set up road blocks and are searching an area of 200,000 square kilometres. The breakout occurred on the fourth day of a hunger strike by most of the detainees in the centre. It also follows previous breakouts during the Easter Woomera 2002 protests and a mass breakout by detainees in 1999.

More recently at the Woomera, conditions have reverted back to the same old repression and suffering following some improvements made for a visit by the UN. There are reports of children being placed in a punishment compound and other accusations of mistreatment, particularly relating to the enforcement of the Child Protection Act.

[For links and more information: [www.melbourne.indymedia.org](http://www.melbourne.indymedia.org)]

## Detention Centres UK – Current Situation

Immigration detainees are locked up without charge or conviction, without a written reason being given, without going through a court of law and without any time limit. In 2001 two new detention centres were opened which hugely increased the available detention places. These were Harmondsworth near Heathrow and Yarl's Wood near Bedford.

With the opening of Yarl's Wood the Home Office finally stopped detaining asylum seekers in ordinary prisons.

However, since a large fire at Yarl's Wood on 14th February 2002, some detainees have been returned to prisons. In February 2002 the closure of Campsfield House detention centre near Oxford was announced. Currently the expected date for its closure is Spring 2003. Although this news is long overdue it is a hollow victory given the general trend in the UK to increasing detention of asylum seekers and the increased capacity to do so.

<http://www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk/>

## Harmondsworth detention centre update:

A full-scale prison regime is to be introduced for asylum seekers. Internal security gates installed, hampering free movement and the freedom of association. There will also be a possible curtailment of visiting hours and much more.

[[http://uk.indymedia.org/front.php3?article\\_id=34830](http://uk.indymedia.org/front.php3?article_id=34830)]

Close Down Harmondsworth [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk),

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# Refugee Council - Nailing press myths about refugees

The issue of asylum in the UK is rarely out of the British press: it has become, nationally and regionally, a hotly debated issue. If some sections of the British press are to be believed, UK shores are being 'swamped' by an 'invasion' of 'bogus' refugees, scroungers and criminals, intent on exploiting the social welfare system and living in the lap of luxury at the taxpayer's expense.

Terms such as 'asylum seekers', 'illegal immigrants', 'economic migrants' are used interchangeably, misleading the public. Here, some of the most common negative assumptions are challenged and set the record straight:

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

"we resent the scroungers, beggars and crooks who are prepared to cross every country in Europe to reach our generous benefits system." - The Sun, 7/3/01

**The Facts** - Is Britain really the land of milk and honey? In fact, no. Asylum seekers are not allowed to claim mainstream welfare benefits. If they are destitute, their only option is to apply for support with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), the Government department responsible for supporting destitute asylum applicants.

NASS support is very basic indeed. A single adult, for example,

has to survive on £37.77 a week - 30% below the poverty line. It is therefore irrational to suggest that asylum seekers embark on arduous and often dangerous journeys to the UK for that amount of money.

Asylum applicants are not allowed to work for the first six months of their asylum application date. This means that even though many of them bring valuable skills and qualifications with them, they simply have to rely on NASS support if they are destitute.

"Around 80 per cent of those who claim refugee status are eventually judged to be bogus".

- Mail on Sunday, 14/10/0

**The Facts** - In fact, in 2001, in 31% of initial asylum decisions, the Home Office granted either refugee status or exceptional leave to remain. The Refugee Council also estimates that taking into account applicants who were successful at different appeals and where the Home Office overturned its own initial refusal decision, the number of successful applicants in 2001 was as high as 51%.

That the initial decision rate is so much lower than the final one is a reflection of the poor quality of decision-making at the initial stage. A large number of asylum seekers have their applications refused on purely procedural grounds.

"Illegals flooding into UK"

- Daily Star, 31/10/01

**The Facts** - In January 2002, the Advertising Standards Authority upheld a complaint against a polling company, which sent out a fax referring to asylum seekers as 'illegals', as racist, offensive and misleading. Asylum seekers are not in the UK illegally.

The UK has signed the 1951 Convention on Refugees, which means that anyone has the legal right to come here, apply for asylum and remain in the UK until a final decision on their asylum application has been made.

"Our town's too nice for refugees...they will try to escape, rapists and thieves will terrorise us"

- Daily Express, 23/3/02

**The Facts** - A report published by the Association of Chief Police Officers recently confirmed that there is no evidence for a higher rate of criminality among refugees and asylum seekers. In fact, having fled from their home country, they are more likely to become victims of crime in the UK.

There have been countless attacks on dispersed asylum seekers around Britain, including the murder of an asylum seeker in Glasgow in 2001. The murder prompted the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to condemn the British media for provoking racial hatred.

"Britain is top asylum haven"

- Daily Mail, 2/2/02

**The Facts** - The truth about refugee movements is that the vast majority flee to countries bordering their home country. Nearly two thirds of all refugees are found in the Middle East and in Africa. The Middle East hosts more than 6 million refugees, and there are more than 3.3 million refugees in Africa. The world's poorest countries bear the responsibility for the largest numbers of refugees.

"Bogus refugees treated better than UK citizens" - The Sun, 18/02/02

**The Facts** - This is one of many reports claiming detained asylum seekers are living in a lap of luxury at the tax payers expense. In fact, the United Nations has severely criticised the UK's detention record for its lack of independent judicial review of the decision to detain.

The UK detains asylum seekers for longer and with less scrutiny than in any other European country. In effect, asylum seekers are kept in prison-like circumstances even though they have not committed any crime, and on top of that are even exempt from the natural justice available to UK citizens. Recent Government figures show that 27% of people had been detained for more than four months. 5% had been detained for over a year.

## International Newswire

After September 2001, as the imperialist "war against terrorism" makes inroads into Africa, Asia, the Middle East and in Latin America we see human lives in many countries becoming increasingly worthless in this relentless pursuit.

Repressive regimes all over the world are using the US-led war to silence critical voices at home. Powerful states like Britain and Germany are following the USA with their armed forces into the hearts these countries in an effort not to lose out as the last resources of the world are colonised and distributed.

This new war has no respect for the sanctity of the lives of the most oppressed people, nor for human rights in the poorest countries in the world. As thousands flee, suffering torture and death to seek safety and more sustainable lives, they are turned away at borders, where global capital and goods cross with ease.

### Mexico: Migrant deaths illustrate the border crisis

Sixteen people have perished on the border in a four-day period from June 6th, 2002. 76 deaths were documented in 2001 as migrants attempted to cross the

Arizona border - and on May 24 2001, fourteen people died in the harsh Cabeza Prieta desert of Southwestern Arizona. With drought and summer heat, migrants crossing the Arizona desert face a perilous journey. In response to the deepening border crisis, human rights, social justice, and indigenous groups are demanding that Republican Representative Jim Kolbe immediately take measures to reform border policy - and to separate the "War on Terrorism" from immigration policy.  
<http://www.arizona.indymedia.org>

### International noborder-camp to take place in Strasbourg (July 19-28th)

This year Strasbourg will be the scene of the first Europe-wide noborder camp. This camp initiated by the noborder network and organized by activist groups from a number of European countries will consist of 10 days of actions, workshops and discussions around the central demand of 'freedom of movement and settlement' for everyone. The camp aims bringing together activists, migrants and artists from across Europe in laboratory of creative resistance and civil disobedience. Strasbourg was chosen because it is home to the central headquarters of the Schengen Information Systems [SIS] - not for its reputation as the capital of European unity.  
<http://www.noborder.org>

### Spain: EU Summit in Seville - Fighting against Fortress Europe

Seville hosted the EU summit of 20-21 June, marking the end of Spain's EU presidency. The main subjects of the Seville summit were the strengthening of "fortress Europe" and the toughening of immigration laws.

Meanwhile, the Seville Social Forum, unions, disobedients and many groups within Spanish civil society called for two days of action against the Europe of Capital and War that concluded with a 200,000 strong demonstration in the streets of Seville.

Saturday 22nd was the Day of solidarity with immigrants: The focus of the day's actions, workshops, debates and demonstrations was to highlight issues related to immigration, social exclusion and the casualisation of labour.

Over 100 demonstrators occupied a church to draw attention to the situation of 400 or more asylum seekers occupying the University Pablo Olavide in Seville, the migrants without papers, will be forced to leave Spain in the coming weeks.

They were demanding that the public institutions open negotiations with the occupying migrants, who were also on hunger strike.

For more information: [www.barcelona.indymedia.org](http://www.barcelona.indymedia.org)