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#FamiliesTogether

Week of Action Toolkit

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Dear activists,

We all know how important family is – after all where would you be without your family?

Our Families Together Campaign Action Week – which sees activists from STAR, Oxfam and Amnesty International UK joining forces – is a fantastic chance to reunite refugee families and YOU can make this happen.

Refugee children and families who have been separated by war and persecution are being kept apart by strict UK family reunion rules. The government has the power to change this at the stroke of a pen – but needs to hear your voice telling them this is the right thing to do.

A crucial debate on the issue will be held in Parliament on the 16 March and we need at least 100 MPs to turn up and vote. **This is where you can make a massive difference.** From 16 to 23 of February we will be taking action to make it clear to MPs that their constituents are demanding a change to unfair rules which keep refugees apart from loved ones.

Refugees should not be separated from their families. Let's work together – join us in this week of action and let MPs know the importance of #FamiliesTogether.

CAMPAIGN ACTION WEEK: FAMILIES TOGETHER

Refugee families who have already been separated by war and persecution are being kept apart by strict UK family reunion rules.

On Friday 16 March 2018, MPs will debate an important bill that could make vital changes to the current rules and reunite refugee families, but we need at least 100 MPs to turn up and vote. So from 16 to 23 February we will be taking action to show MPs that their constituents want them to support family reunion and vote to change the unfair rules that keep refugees in the UK apart from those they love.

THE PROBLEM

The UK's restrictive refugee family reunion rules are keeping families apart. Adult refugees can sponsor only their very closest relatives to join them – their partners and children under 18 years old – and refugee children in the UK have no family reunion rights so can't bring their parents to join them.

THE SOLUTION

We are asking for:

- 1 Child refugees in the UK to have the right to sponsor their family, so they can rebuild their lives together and help them integrate in their new community
- 2 An expansion of who qualifies as a family, so that young people who have turned 18 and elderly parents can live in safety with their families in the UK
- 3 The reintroduction of legal aid, so refugees who have lost everything have the support they need to afford and navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families.

Together we can reunite families torn apart by war and persecution, if our MPs vote to change the unfair rules that keep refugees in the UK apart from those they love.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

Around the world more than 65 million people – half of them children – have been forced from their homes due to conflict, violence and persecution. Although international law states that families are entitled to protection, displacement and flight are forcing them apart. Refugee family reunion is often the only way to ensure that a refugee's right to family unity can be realised.

Not only is refugee family reunion a way to reunite divided families, but it is also a tool that governments can use to offer refugees a safe and legal way to escape danger, and access protection from conflict in countries such as Syria, South Sudan, and Afghanistan.

In the UK, restrictive family reunion rules are keeping families apart. Adult refugees can sponsor only their very closest relatives to join them – their partners and children under 18 years old. Refugee children do not have the right to sponsor any family members to join them.

This means that mothers and fathers in the UK are unable to bring their children over the age of 18 to join them; refugee children in the UK are forced to live apart from their parents; and refugees are unable to bring elderly relatives to live with them in safety.

It has left people facing a stark choice: stay separated from their families in precarious, unsafe situations near or in their home countries, or embark on perilous journeys to reach loved ones already living in safety.

CASE STUDY

'These are already some of the most vulnerable children that have been through a terrible time to get here.

They then face endless barriers from language, culture, accessing appropriate support... To say, at the end of all that, that they are not allowed to be reunited with their family is one of the most difficult things that the children we work with face... We see a lot of self-harm, problems with sleep, post traumatic stress disorder.

You have to remember these are children who have often been through unimaginable things and now they are being told they cannot be reunited with their families.'

Hayley Cohen, Case work manager, Young Roots – supporting young asylum seekers, Croydon, London



The lack of opportunities for refugees to reunite with family members in the UK not only forces them to turn to smugglers, but also exacerbates the humanitarian crises in European countries like Greece and Italy, where displaced people arrive by sea in an attempt to join their families and instead end up trapped, living in squalid conditions and unable to exercise their rights.

For refugees already living in safety in the UK the forced separation from their families and constant anxiety about their wellbeing can be devastating, preventing them from rebuilding their lives and undermining their successful integration into their new communities.

In 2017 Amnesty International UK, the British Red Cross, the Refugee Council, Oxfam, UNHCR and STAR joined together to campaign for improved family reunion rules.

The campaign coalition has helped Angus MacNeil MP to secure a debate in Parliament on 16 March that could change the rules, but at least 100 MPs need to attend and vote to allow refugees in the UK to be joined by their families.

By ensuring refugee families can stay together, the UK government can:

- make an important contribution to addressing the biggest global displacement crisis since the Second World War
- help make families more resilient in the face of displacement
- prevent people from embarking on dangerous journeys, and
- support the integration of refugees in the UK.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

During the week of action we need to show your MP that their constituents want them to attend Parliament on 16 March to vote to change the unfair rules that keep refugees in the UK apart from those they love. **As a group the most important thing you can do is to contact your MP and ask them to attend the debate on 16 March.**

Here's how to raise this issue with your MP.

LINK UP WITH OTHER GROUPS

Link up with other Amnesty, Oxfam, British Red Cross and STAR groups in your area and plan your week of action together. You could organise joint events, take part in a stunt or meet your MP together.

If you don't know whether there are other groups in your area get in touch (contact details on last page). Even if you don't take action together it's good to let other groups know what you're up to.

ORGANISE A FAMILY PHOTO STUNT

We want groups across the country to spell out that they care about this. Cut out and decorate letters which spell out FAMILY and take a photo of you holding them in your school, university or in front of a local iconic landmark.

We'll use these photos in a huge collage outside parliament on 16 March to showcase all the different groups who support the right for refugee families to be together. **These photos are a great way of showing your MP that there's support for your campaign as well as being a fun way to engage new people with the issue.**



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Here's what you need to do:

- 1 Download our cut-out [template letters](#).
- 2 Cut them out and use them to create A3 cardboard letters spelling FAMILY – if you've got the time you could make your own bigger letters.
- 3 Organise an event, meeting or stall for people to come along and decorate your letters. People could write on them what family means to them, add photos or simply colour them in.
- 4 Organise a photo of your group holding your letters. If your group is small, this could be a few people in your regular meeting. If you're a bit bigger why not organise a flash mob in a public space?
- 5 Tweet your photo at your MP using the hashtag #FamiliesTogether or take a copy of it when you meet them (see below).
- 6 When you meet your MP take a copy of your stunt photo to show them this issue has support from your group.
- 7 Send a digital copy of your photo to the email addresses on page 6 by 26 February. We'll use it in a collage outside Parliament.
- 8 Share your action on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) using the #FamiliesTogether hashtag to inspire other groups to take action.

MEET YOUR MP

The most effective way of [lobbying your MP](#) is to arrange a meeting with them to talk about the vote in Parliament on 16 March.

MPs are in their constituency office most Fridays, so you can arrange your meeting for Friday 23 February, which is our mass lobbying day. If your MP can't meet on 23 February, any time before 16 March still works but the earlier the better. **Try to arrange this meeting as soon as possible.**



To arrange your meeting you just need to call your MP's office and see if they are available.

When you meet your MP you will need to explain what's happening on 16 March, and why you want them to attend and vote. You can use the information in this toolkit. Don't worry – your MP won't expect you to be an expert. They just want to know why you care.

If your MP is supportive ask them to take a photo with our [pledge which you can download here](#).

Even if they can't make the vote on 16 March, taking a photo with the pledge is a great way for them to show support.

We know it can be daunting to meet your MP, especially for the first time, but they're usually very friendly and open to meeting you, their constituents. Remember, you have a right to meet your MP, regardless of whether you voted for them. [Check out this guide for some great hints and tips](#).

CONTACT YOUR MP

Not everyone in your group, university or community is going to be able to meet your MP, so asking them to write a letter is a great way for your MP to know there's broad support for your campaign.

The most effective letters are written in your own words, but here are some points it would be good to include:

- Separation of refugee families can have a devastating impact on their lives.
- You would like to see the UK government change restrictive rules that keep refugee families apart.
- You recognise that Friday is an important day for MPs to be in their constituency. However, as a constituent you would like them to make an exception and support the Refugee Family Reunion Bill in Westminster.
- Will they commit to attending the Second Reading of the Refugee Family Reunion Bill on Friday 16 March 2018 and vote in favour of the bill?
- Don't forget to include your address in the letter so your MP can respond.

If you're stuck for time or what to say, you can [download our template MP letter](#).

Why not organise an event or stall where people can write their letters? You can take your group's letters to your meeting with your MP or post them along with a photo of your stunt.

If you can't write a letter to your MP, then please call their office to request they attend and support the Second Reading of the Refugee Family Reunion Private Members Bill, on 16 March 2018.

Don't forget to check the websites at the end of this briefing for the latest online actions.

GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED

We want as many different MPs to hear from as many different people as possible about why they should attend the vote on 16 March and your family can be crucial to this.

Speak to your family and ask them if they would email, write to or meet their MP about the issue.

Currently refugees in the UK are kept apart from the ones they love. Talk to your family about why family is important to you – how would you or they feel if you were kept apart?

Your family can use the [template MP letter](#) or better still write their own.



DEFINITIONS

■ **Refugee:** A person who is forced to leave their country of origin and seek protection in another country because of 'a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' (the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees).

■ **Asylum seeker:** A person who has fled to another country, has made an application for protection as a refugee and is waiting for that country to decide if they will be recognised as a refugee.

■ **Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child:** Anyone under 18 years of age who is separated from both parents and without an adult caring for them, and is seeking asylum.

■ **Refugee family reunion:** A process by which refugees can be reunited with their family; it is a right attached to being recognised as a refugee. In the UK, only very few family relations qualify; currently, the sponsor has to be an adult refugee in the UK and can only apply for a partner and children under the age of 18 to come to join them.

CASE STUDY

Muhammed and Amal are from Syria. They fled to Libya with their four children shortly after the conflict began. Life in Libya became increasingly dangerous while they were there and after two years Muhammed decided to make the journey to Europe.

Muhammed was granted refugee status in the UK. Aware that his son, Kusai, was due to turn 18 very soon, making him ineligible for family reunion, Muhammed immediately began the process of applying to bring his family to the UK.

That application was rejected. Muhammed knew that his 20-year-old daughter, Athar, might not be accepted but also knew that, under family reunion law, he had the right to bring his wife and any children under the age of 18 to the UK. It turned out that the reason for the rejection was Kusai's passport expiring while the family was in Libya. While awaiting that decision Kusai turned 18 and became ineligible for family reunion.

Muhammed appealed, and a judge ruled that while Muhammed's wife and two youngest children were eligible for family reunion and could come to the UK, Kusai and Athar were rejected on the basis of being over 18 years old.

While Athar has remained in the region, Kusai decided to take matters into his own hands and took the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean to a makeshift camp in unthinkable conditions in Calais*.

*Case study accurate as of May 2016

PROMOTE YOUR WEEK OF ACTION

Social media is a brilliant way to spread the message. Upload photos of your action and your MP meeting using the hashtag #FamiliesTogether. We'll share them nationally across our social media channels to inspire other groups to take action.

Letting your local or student media know about your week of action is a great way to get more people involved and bring it to your MP's attention. Get in touch if you want help contacting the media.



GET IN TOUCH!

If you want any help in planning your week of action, preparing to meet your MP, or if you need any materials, please get in touch.

It's really important that we know which MPs are planning to attend the debate on the 16 March. Please let us know any feedback from your MP, particularly if they plan to attend or expressed support.

Amnesty International UK
anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk

www.amnesty.org.uk/familiestogether