**I Welcome Campaign - Families Together Action January 2019**

Family life can be wonderful! The everyday things we may take for granted, like sharing a meal, playing a game, or even just curling up on the sofa in front of the TV, are truly incredible moments to cherish and celebrate.

But where would we all be without our families?

Refugees in the UK often find themselves separated from their families following brutal experiences of conflict or persecution. Being reunited with family members can be a life changing moment, bringing together loved ones who had been torn apart by war and violence.

Restrictive Home Office rules prevent many families from being together just when they need each other the most. These rules risk driving people to undertake dangerous journeys, often putting their lives in the hands of people smugglers, so that they can be with their relatives.

Please TAKE ACTION to reunite more refugee families in the UK.

**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 – while child refugees in the UK are excluded from rules allowing for family reunion so cannot bring their parents to join them.

**The Solution**

With the stroke of a pen, the Home Secretary can:

1) Allow child refugees in the UK the right to sponsor their close family to join them, so they can rebuild their lives together and help them integrate in their new community

2) Expand who qualifies as family, so that young people who have turned 18 and elderly parents can join their family in the UK

The government should also:

3) Reintroduce legal aid for refugee family reunion cases, so people who have lost everything have the support they need to afford and navigate the complicated process of being reunited with their families.

**The Opportunity**

The Government is aware of the momentum building with this campaign. The Families Together Coalition, which is coordinated by Amnesty International UK, British Red Cross, Oxfam, Refugee Council and the UNHCR, is backed by 28 different organisations. In March 2018 the Coalition worked closely with Angus MacNeil MP on a Private Members Bill to change the rules, which passed its 2nd reading with the support of 131 MPs from across the main political parties. Thousands of people have signed a [petition](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/home-secretary-reunite-refugee-families?from=issue) to the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, calling for the change. The Home Secretary has the power to change the rules with the stroke of a pen and we want him to hear this message from MPs across the political spectrum.

There are also two parliamentary processes, which could create the change we seek:

1. The Government recently published the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill, which empowers the Home Secretary to remove EU free movement rights from UK law. We aim to secure an amendment on refugee family reunion for MPs to support.
2. The Refugee Family Reunion Bill is still on the agenda but remains in stuck in a Parliamentary process. We need your help to press Parliament to get it passed into law.

The amendment we are seeking to make to the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill will:

* Expand the criteria of who qualifies as a family member for the purposes of refugee family reunion allowing adult refugees in the UK to sponsor their adult children and siblings that are under the age of 25; and their parents.
* Give unaccompanied refugee children in the United Kingdom the right to sponsor their parents and siblings that are under the age of 25 to join them under the refugee family reunion rules.

Your MP could play a vital role in achieving the above goals. The Government is trying to push the Immigration Bill through parliament by 29 March 2019, so it’s important they hear from as many as their constituents as soon as possible.

**TAKE ACTION**

Please write to your MP and make three requests:

* Ask them to contact the Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, raising the concerns you have highlighted.
* Ask them to raise the issue of refugee family reunion during the passage of the upcoming Immigration Bill, and support amendments if the opportunity arises.
* Ask them to support the passage of the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Private Members’ Bill including by asking the Government to ensure the Bill is granted proper time for debate.

You can tailor your letter depending on whether your MP has already supported the campaign. You can find a list here of the 131 MPs who have backed the Private Members Bill here: <http://refugeestogether.uk/>

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

* You appreciate their support for the Refugee Family Reunion Bill (if they have done this). *Check here if your MP attended the 2nd Reading of the Bill:* <http://refugeestogether.uk/>
* 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 would like your MP to raise your concerns with the Home Secretary
* You would like them to support any future amendments to Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill that:
* Expand the criteria of who qualifies as a family member for the purposes of refugee family reunion allowing adult refugees in the UK to sponsor their adult children and siblings that are under the age of 25; and their parents.
* Give unaccompanied refugee children in the United Kingdom the right to sponsor their parents and siblings that are under the age of 25 to join them under the refugee family reunion rules;
* You would like them to support the passage of the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Private Members’ Bill including by asking the Government to ensure the Bill is granted proper time for debate
* Don't forget to include your address in the letter so your MP can respond

If you are stuck for time or what to say, you can download a template MP letter here:

**Template letter for supportive MPs**

**Template letter for other MPs**

**Background**

More about the Families Together coalition: <http://refugeestogether.uk>

More about the issue: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/how-we-support-refugees/families-together>

A report on the impact of separation on refugee families <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0004/2515/Safe_but_not_settled.pdf>

**Further Action**

* **GET YOUR FAMILY INVOLVED**

We want as many different MPs to hear from as many different people as possible, about why they should support the call to expand refugee family reunion in the UK. Your family can be a part of this. If you can - ask them to 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 feel, as a family, if you were kept apart by restrictive Home Office rules?

* **TWITTER**

If you’re on Twitter, tweet a picture of you holding a sign saying I support #FamiliesTogether, tagging in your MP. Use the #FamiliesTogether so that other supporters can retweet your message.

* **ONLINE**

Take action online: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/familiestogether>

**Feedback**

It’s really important that we know which MPs are supportive of the issue. Please share any feedback or responses from your MP at parliament@amnesty.org.uk