**Amnesty International UK**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL: 00.01 WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL 2019**

**160 UK CLUBS PLEDGE SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES IN BIGGEST EVER ‘FOOTBALL WELCOMES’ WEEKEND**

**Record-breaking number of football clubs to take part in Amnesty’s ‘Football Welcomes’ weekend to celebrate the contribution refugees make to the game**

**Initiative backed by clubs from across Scottish football and the SPFL Trust**

**New survey reveals fans have seen an increase in racism and xenophobia in football, but overwhelmingly believe football clubs should be a force for good**

Amnesty International UK’s Football Welcomes is back for its third year with a record-breaking number of clubs taking part in the weekend of activities (27-28 April) to celebrate the contribution players with refugee backgrounds make to the game.

More than 160 clubs – almost triple the previous year’s number – are set to take part to highlight the important role football clubs can play in welcoming refugees into their local communities, and in helping them to settle in to a new country and culture.

This year’s event will see football clubs from across Scotland, England and Wales giving free match tickets to refugees and people seeking asylum, arranging player visits, stadium tours, or organising matches and tournaments for refugees in their communities. Others will have first team players warming up in Football Welcomes t-shirts and promote the weekend in their programmes and on their websites.

With support from People’s Postcode Lottery and backed by professional clubs across the UK as well as grassroots and non-league teams across the country, Football Welcomes celebrates the role of refugee players in UK football.

From a group of children who fled the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s and became some of the first refugees to play professionally in the UK, from Liverpool’s Dejan Lovren to Arsenal’s Granit Xhaka, Crystal Palace’s Christian Benteke, Charlton Athletic’s  Liz Ejupi and ex-Manchester City forward Nadia Nadim, players with a refugee background have been making their mark on the game for decades.

Ahead of the weekend, Amnesty is releasing new data which reveals the rise in racism and xenophobia in football and the calls from Scottish fans to tackle it. The survey of Scottish ‘football fans’ shows:

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* 58% have seen an increase in racism and 46% have seen an increase in xenophobia in the last three years;
* 31% have seen an increase in the amount that they have witnessed racism and / or xenophobia;
* 21% have seen an increase in the amount that they have personally experienced it; and
* 86% agree that clubs have a responsibility to tackle racism / xenophobia.

Despite this, the results show that the majority 95% of Scottish ‘football fans’ think football clubs should be a 'force for good' in their local community. 45% say they are proud of the community work their football club does and 53% say football gives them a sense of belonging.

Naomi Westland, Football Welcomes Manager at Amnesty International UK said:

“It’s clear that football is a powerful force for good, bringing people together and providing a sense of belonging, and we are delighted that more clubs than ever are taking part in Football Welcomes this year.

 “Football clubs are at the heart of their communities and can play an important role in creating respect and friendship across cultures.

“With so many people across the globe forced to abandon their homes due to conflict and persecution, this weekend the message from football is clear: refugees are welcome in the UK.”

“It can take a lot of integrity and courage to stand up against divisive and hateful actions and rhetoric but as football players, teams and fans it’s important we all play our part.

“Lots of people identify with football, wherever they are from and whatever their background. That’s why it’s so heartening to see the footballing community come together for a weekend of welcoming and supporting refugees.”

To find out more about Football Welcomes and see a map of participating clubs please visit [www.amnesty.org.uk/footballwelcomes](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/footballwelcomes)

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**References:**

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size of all GB adults was 2077, of which 83 were Scottish ‘football fans’. ‘Football fans’ include those that watch or follow football to some extent, including those that only follow football during major games and tournaments. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th - 17th April 2019. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

**Amnesty International Scotland media information:**

Pauline Kelly: 07818 453070 pauline.kelly@amnesty.org.uk

Twitter: @AmnestyScotland

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